

cross currents in culture ●

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Contributing

We welcome contributions in the form of news, reviews, articles, interviews, polemical pieces and artists' pages. Guidelines for writers are available on request and at the Variant website.

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Front cover & centre pages: Every action will be judged on the particular circumstances

The five anti-war activists who damaged a US military aircraft in 2003 justified their actions on the grounds that they honestly and completely believed their actions were protecting the lives and property of people who did not have an opportunity to defend themselves,¹ mainly the very young and very old of Iraq, innocent civilians caught up in the ‘shock and awe’ campaign of what the United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan referred to as an ‘illegal war’, being in violation of the UN charter.²

The fact that the activists had the ability to directly effect US Military hardware on Irish soil, calls into question the tenets of the Irish constitution which states that, “War shall not be declared and the State shall not participate in any war save with the assent of the House of Representatives.”³ The constitution also declares that, “Ireland accepts the generally recognised principles of international law”,⁴ but the High Court has recently ruled that this provision is merely aspirational and is not enforceable.⁵

The ‘tools’ of disarmament, the hammers which the activists used, were recently returned to their owners by the Gardai two years after the five

activists were acquitted of the charges of criminal damage, on the grounds of lawful excuse. One of the hammers has clocked up approximately \$7 million worth of damage to military hardware through previous actions.

The hammers have been termed ‘tools’, ‘weapons’, ‘evidence of criminal activity’, and of late ‘icons of civil disobedience’. This shift between definitions is indicative of the situation in which they have been represented, of how these objects might be presented with regards to particular agendas or particular circumstances. The very image of the hammers with their anti-war / religious slogans engraved into their handles speaks of the duality or conflict of purpose and the blurring of identity which has come to represent the political situation in which they have been instrumentalised.

This relative objectivity purports to the blurring of definitions, of relative interpretation which have been applied to the Irish constitution in defining a position on neutrality and ultimately on democracy.

Seamus Nolan, 2008

Thanks to the Pitstop Ploughshares for loaning the Hammers for this exhibition at Project Arts Centre, Dublin. The exhibition was curated by Jonathan Carroll, Mark Garry and Georgina Jackson, and the project organised by the Goethe-Institut Irland, Project Arts Centre, and the Austrian Embassy Dublin.

Notes

1. “The Criminal Damage Act 1991, amended in 1997, provides a defense of lawful excuse to the offense if the accused was acting to defend himself or another or property belonging to himself or another. The action taken must be reasonable in the circumstance, as the accused believed those circumstances to be. It is immaterial whether such a belief is justified, so long as it is honestly held.” *The Clare Champion*, Friday July 28th 2006.
2. Ciaran O Reilly, DailyIreland.com
3. Article 28 3.1, The Constitution of Ireland
4. Article 29 3, The Constitution of Ireland
5. Horgan vs. Ireland, case No. 3739P

Letters

What follows is an open letter to Mike Russell MSP, Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution, concerning Creative Scotland (the proposed merger of the public bodies, the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen) that will shortly be sent to him. The letter was formed through open group discussion and concentrated exchanges between artists and members of Variant’s affinity group. If you concur with the letter and wish to sign it, either in a personal or ‘official’ capacity, then please email Variant at: variantmag@btinternet.com

For ongoing analysis of the Creative Scotland debacle, please visit: creativescotland.blogspot.com

Open Letter to Mike Russell MSP, Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution

Dear Mike Russell,

Re. Promotional Culture versus Democratic Culture: The Case of Creative Scotland

After a long series of confusing twists and turns over cultural policy in Scotland it is clear that there is considerable controversy surrounding the proposed cultural body Creative Scotland. We believe Creative Scotland is already impoverishing culture by promoting and envisaging it in overwhelmingly industrial terms. This misguided approach ultimately fixates on anything or anyone that can be bought, sold or put into debt¹, and stands against the spirit and letter of the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* which came into force in March 2007.²

So far, the formation of Creative Scotland has been a largely opportunistic political and bureaucratic exercise in a country which suffers from significant democratic deficits despite our devolved parliament. It is therefore vital that this organisation, if it is to truly represent the interests of culture, builds moral and democratic authority. We take your recent ministerial appointment as evidence of the seriousness of this problem at the heart of Creative Scotland.

It is disappointing that your first public meeting, at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh (18th February 2009) about the new cultural agenda was with a selected gathering. Many people who wanted to attend, such as the President of University Colleges Union in Scotland, were excluded. It should go without saying that there are intertwined problems of protecting criticality and freedom in education as in culture. However, the ‘Team Scotland’ ethos already expressed for Creative Scotland³ demonstrates far narrower promotional and business-led objectives that neglect these and other treaty obligations in cultural policy.

Other countries which have also ratified the UNESCO

declaration, such as Sweden, recognise prosperity as an important consideration in cultural aims⁴. Yet, in contrast to successive pronouncements in our country, Sweden’s policy explicitly states the need to counteract “the negative effects of commercialism”. Evidently Scotland and Sweden’s leaders in the cultural policy area are not singing from the same song sheet. However, given that both nations are signed up to the same universal rights and obligations, we, as citizens, are entitled to ask why there has been absolutely no sense in Scotland’s political discourse of all the ways that culture and commerce are not compatible?

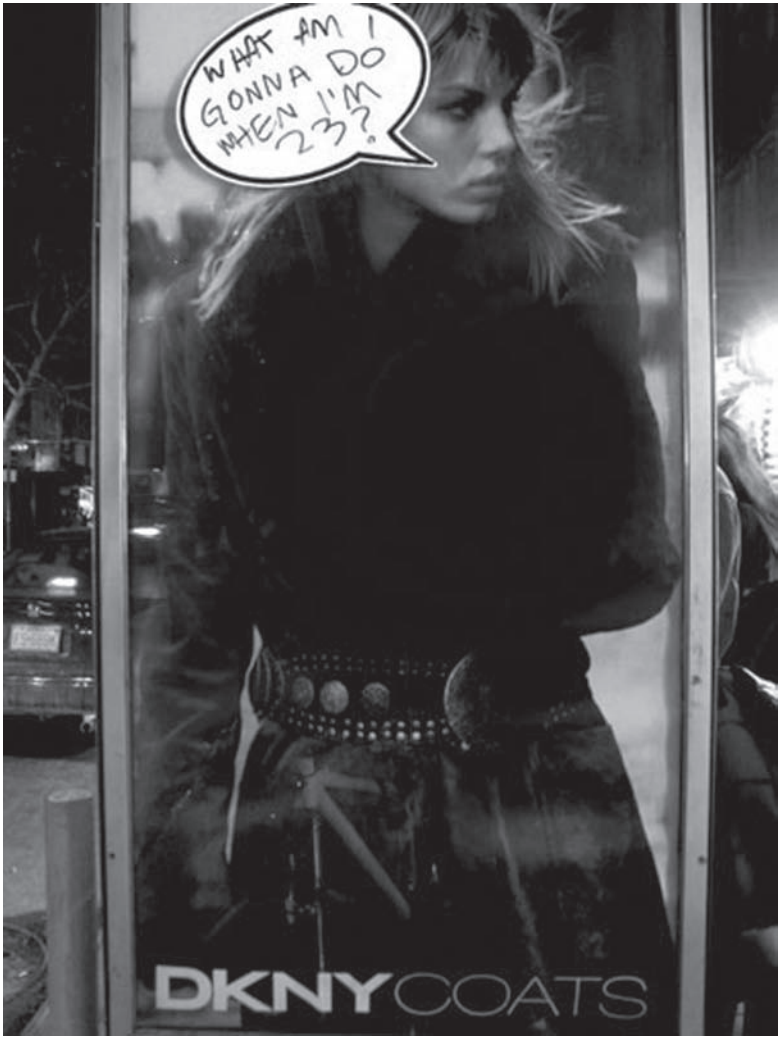
Is it that Scotland is conforming to an old slur against its people and is now ruled by the same short-sighted money-minded people, the best of whom have presided over financial disaster, or is it that we have not been represented in accountable and truly democratic terms? In either case we see the dominant ethos of Creative Scotland as deeply flawed. It is highly inappropriate that Creative Scotland is being forged by bankers and businessmen who are evidently insensitive to, or ignorant of, the broad implications of cultural policy. Their patronage or support for certain cultural activities is no qualification and does not enable them to address culture as whole. We therefore urge the resignation of Ewan Brown, Peter Cabrelli and Chris Masters from the board of Creative Scotland on the grounds of their inability to fully discuss this key issue of democratic society with politicians, civil servants and wider communities.

In accordance with our international obligations under the UNESCO convention from March 2007, it is also essential the following points are recognised in, and made central to, Creative Scotland’s ‘core script’:

- Culture must be protected from commerce, particularly from the economic processes of globalisation.
- The very idea of ‘Team Scotland’ is a symptom of these competitive processes and should be removed. It is not a means to defend diversity of expression, nor does it promote international co-operation. These two obligations should be clearly addressed.
- The poverty, and consequent lack of autonomy, of artists and cultural workers must be acknowledged as a key issue that should be addressed by any cultural organisation seeking to articulate the public interest and the common good.

Notes

1. “The Government wants Scotland to be recognised as one of the world’s most creative nations - one that attracts, develops and retains talent, where the arts and the creative industries are supported and celebrated and *their economic contribution fully captured*.” [our emphasis] Published - 5 February 2009, Support For Creative Industries: Roles And Responsibilities - Core Script
The previous minister Linda Fabiani stated: “If formed, Creative Scotland will add to the range of funding sources available to artists and creative practitioners. As well as grants, it will develop a wider portfolio of funding methods including loans and investments.” This was reinforced further in a *Sunday Herald* article, where



it was reported, “A spokeswoman from the Creative Scotland transition team stated: ‘Creative Scotland will be looking at a range of alternative investment models, with the aim of finding and increasing sources of funding.’ Tax incentives, venture capital, loans and corporate investment are all potential models previously mentioned by the transition team.”

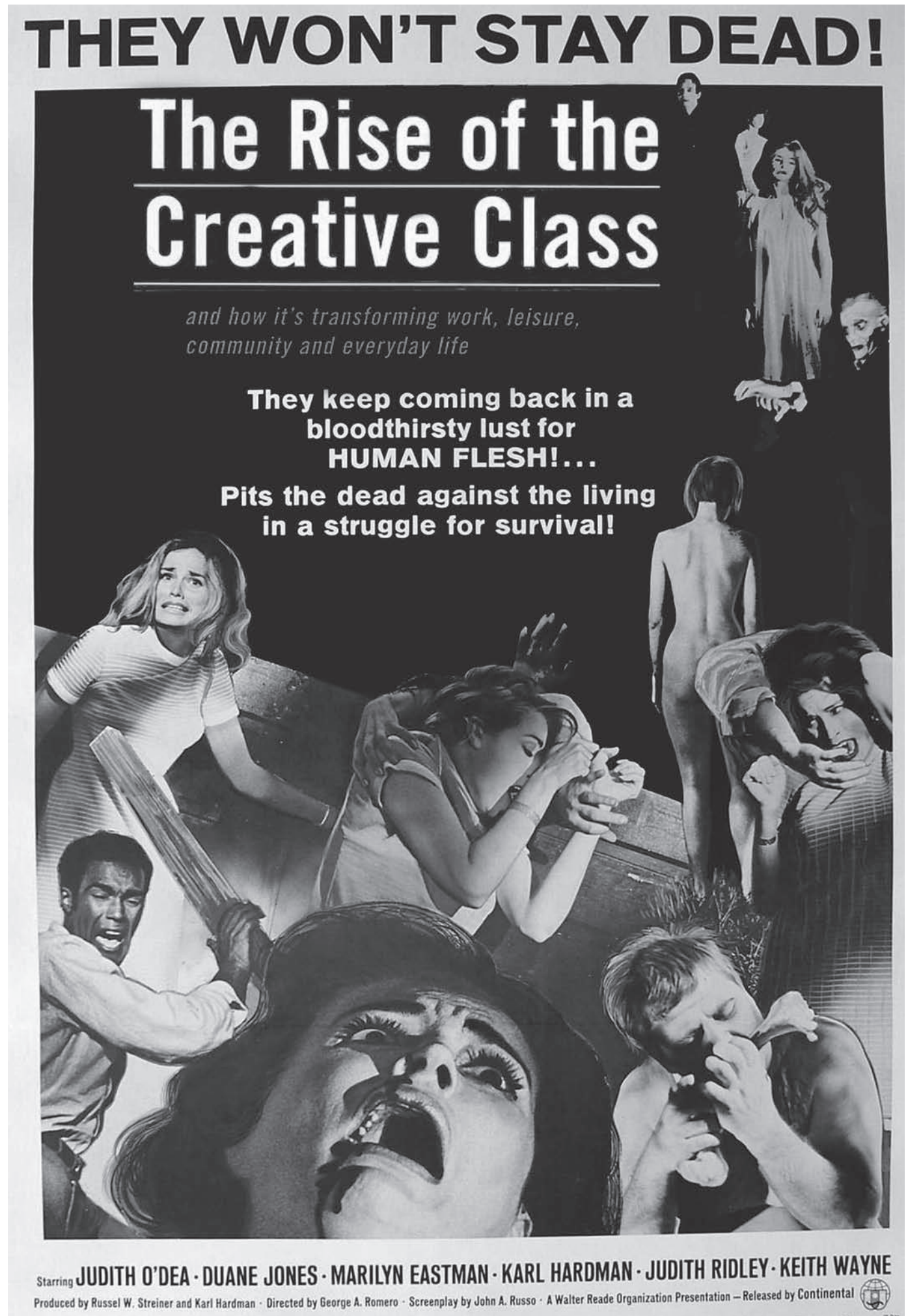
2. Culture is itself broadly defined in the convention as a complex phenomenon; “...consequently cultural goods and services convey identity, values and meaning and cannot be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods like any others...” p4 ‘UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions’.
3. 5 February 2009, Support For Creative Industries: Roles And Responsibilities - Core Script
4. “The objectives of national cultural policy include safeguarding freedom of expression and creating genuine opportunities for everyone to make use of that freedom; taking action to enable everyone to participate in cultural life, to experience culture and to engage in creative activities of their own; promoting cultural diversity, artistic renewal and quality, thus counteracting the negative effects of commercialism; enabling culture to act as a dynamic, challenging and independent force in society; preserving and making use of our cultural heritage; promoting the thirst for learning, and promoting international cultural exchange and meetings between different cultures in the country.” ‘Sweden’s objectives of national cultural policy’ www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/3009/a/72002

The Creativity Fix

Jamie Peck

Creativity is the new black. An increasingly fashionable urban-development script has it that an historically distinctive “creative economy” – powered by raw human talent, as cool as it is competitive – is displacing sclerotic, organization-era capitalism. The prime movers in this new new economy are members of the so-called Creative Class, a mobile elite whose finicky lifestyle preferences increasingly shape the geographies of economic growth. We are told that cities – like corporations – have become embroiled in an endless “war for talent”, as flows of creative individuals have become the fundamental vectors of innovation-rich growth. And lo, there is man in black at the centre of this burgeoning creativity fad – Richard Florida, who makes frequent recourse to sartorial signifiers in his best-selling primers on the creative economy. As an architect and popularizer of the creative class thesis, Florida has been feted around the world as a cool-cities guru. His germinal texts on the creativity thesis serve, simultaneously, as cliff notes for Creative Economics 101, as how-to manuals for anxious city leaders and opportunistic policymakers, and as lifestyle guides for the rising class of creatives.¹ While Florida’s catchy notions concerning the creative city and its favoured inhabitants have certainly benefited from some savvy promotion, their evident allure and alleged salience have little to do with the intrinsic explanatory power of the model of creative growth – “my theory”² – or indeed the inventiveness of the associated marketing push. Rather, the creative-cities thesis has travelled so far so fast because – as a seductive urban development script-cum-vision, complete with prescriptively defined policy practices and positions – it has been artfully crafted for today’s neoliberalized political-economic terrain.

The creativity script encodes an engaging “economic imaginary,” based on a set of principles that combine cultural libertarianism and contemporary urban-design motifs with neoliberal economic imperatives. Undeniably, there are liberal and even progressive themes running through the creativity script – notably, its explicit embrace of social diversity, arts, and culture, together with its articulation of a positive economic role for (central) cities. But these pinkish elements are folded into a development vision that is profoundly market orientated (creative cities, assets, and actors, always in competition) and individualistic (creative subjects as hedonistic free agents). So while the creativity thesis has generated attention, and controversy in some conservative circles, for highlighting the positive contribution of gays and lesbians to the life of cities, here these contributions are ultimately valued for their economic functionality, or as mere indicators of a favourable competitive climate. Likewise, art and culture are discursively commodified, as productive assets and positive externalities of creative capitalism, while streetlife and authenticity are also located within the circuits of (accelerating) interurban competition. For all its social-liberal compensations, the creativity script works with grain of the contemporary *realpolitik*. It offers a feel-good but fiscally undemanding development vision, consistent with a post-entitlement, intensively competitive urban realm. It facilitates revamped forms of civic boosterism (flogging cultural assets), alongside the gratification of middle-class consumption desires and the lubrication both of flexible labour markets and gentrifying housing markets. The creativity script also subtly relegitimizes regressive social redistributions within the city: the designated overclass of creatives are held to have *earned* their superior position in the creative city, by virtue of raw talent and creative capital, validated through the market, and it is they who must be catered to in what amounts to a post-progressive urban



policy. The lumpen classes of service and manual workers, on the other hand, are so positioned in the new socioeconomic structure by virtue of their creative deficits, and they play little or no positive role in Florida’s account of the creative economy. They must be content with lectures on creative bootstrapping and – in lieu of their own creative awakening – the benefit of downward-trickling positive externalities like the opportunity to wait tables for the creative bohemians.

The discourses and practices of creative-cities policymaking are barely disruptive of the prevailing order of neoliberal urbanism, based inter alia on polarizing labour and housing markets, property- and market-led development, retrenched public services and

social programming, and accelerating intercity competition for jobs, investment, and assets.³ The creative cities thesis represents a “soft” policy fix for this neoliberal urban conjuncture, making the case for modest and discretionary public spending on creative assets, while raising a favoured bundle of middle-class lifestyles – based on self-indulgent forms of overwork, expressive play, and conspicuous consumption – to the status of an urban-development objective. Urban leaders, a key audience for the creativity shtick, are likewise urged to do what it takes to transform their cities into “talent magnets”, having been made acutely aware of the risk – if they do not adequately tend to the needs of the “young and restless” – that they will be demoted to the rust belt of the shiny,

creative economy. Discursively downloading both risk and responsibility, the creative-city concept is predicated on, presumes and (re)produces the dominant market order. So is revealed the funky side of neoliberal urban-development politics.

Creative subjects are celebrated for their hypermobility and for their strictly circumscribed, individualistic commitments to place. These economic hipsters thrive in buzzing 24/7 neighbourhoods, where they can satisfy their craving for “heart-throbblingly real” experiences,⁴ but at the drop of a hat may chose to relocate to an even more happening place. It follows that anything short of public pandering to the needs and desires of the restless creatives is practically guaranteed to secure their automatic “flight”.⁵ The creativity discourse amounts to a paean to the international talent market and its favoured agents, to which cities and regions must be performatively deferential. In this retread of the orthodox globalization script, the argument for decisive local action – featherbedding the creative supply side – is presented as no less than a new urban imperative. Cities must “attract the new

Yet a city’s development strategies will add up to naught in the absence of the third T, tolerance, where open, dynamic, and heterodox local cultures represent the supply-side foundations upon which creative meccas are built. As Florida informed the readers of *Salon* magazine:

“[I]n every economic measure, Detroit and Pittsburgh should be trouncing Austin. These are places that had probably two of the greatest technological powerhouses of their time – they were the Silicon Valleys of their day. Detroit in automotive, Pittsburgh in steel and chemicals [...] What happened, however, was that both places fell victim to institutional and cultural sclerosis. They got trapped in the organizational age; they thought we really live in a patriarchal, white, corporate society and that the key to success was to strap on your tie, go to work 9 to 5, and behave yourself. There was no room for people with new ideas ... [In contrast, what] Austin did was they really hustled. In the 1980s and 1990s they said, ‘We want to grab some of these high-tech companies,’ so they did that. [Then] they said, ‘We’re going to make this a fun place to live’ [...] They created a lifestyle mentality, where Pittsburgh and Detroit were still trapped in that Protestant-ethic/bohemian-ethic split, where people were saying, ‘You can’t have fun!’ or ‘What do you mean play in a rock band? Cut your hair and go to work, son. That’s what’s important.’ Well, Austin was saying, ‘No, no, no, you’re a creative. You want to play in a rock band at night and do semiconductor work in the day? C’mon! And if you want to come in at 10 the next morning and you’re a little hung over or you’re smoking dope, that’s cool.’ [...] Austin saw this from day one.”⁸

Florida uses this kind of sophomoric sociology to make the argument that, riding the new wave of urban economic development, the creatives have inherited the earth, and it is they who now make the rules. The logical, if stark, conclusion is that “the Creative Class has become the dominant class in society”.⁹ Florida softens the edges of this millennial pronouncement with his own form of new-age atmospherics: he frequently declares that every human being has the capacity to be creative, just as every city has a shot at becoming a creative hot spot.

The economics of creativity are more utilitarian: from the perspective of corporations and cities (the difference hardly seems to matter in this instance), talented workers are a scarce resource, yet they are both highly mobile and discerning in their tastes; therefore, they must be given what they want or they will not come/stay; without them, there is only creative disinvestment and economic decline. In the context of a persistent shortfall in the supply of talent, cities must learn what corporations have before them been forced to learn, that if they do not take steps to establish the right “people climate” for creative workers, if they are not appropriately welcoming, “they will wither and die”.¹⁰ There are roles for government in this development vision, but they are safely located on the supply side of the creative economy: establishing the right kind of urban ambience becomes the key to “harnessing” creativity.

Paradoxically, Florida seeks to celebrate certain “qualities of place,” like buzz and cosmopolitanism, while at the same time recirculating pernicious neoliberal narratives of external competitive threat/vulnerability to flight. “The core of the challenge is what I’ve come to see as the new global competition for talent, a phenomenon that promises to radically reshape the world in the coming decades. No longer will economic might amass in countries according to their natural resources, manufacturing excellence, military dominance, or even scientific and technological prowess. Today, the terms of competition revolve around a central axis: a nation’s ability to mobilize, attract, and retain human creative talent [...] The global talent pool and the high-end, high-margin creative industries that used to be the sole province of the US and the crucial source of its prosperity have begun to disperse around the globe. A host of countries – Ireland, Finland, Canada, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand among them – are investing in higher education, producing creative people, and churning out cutting-edge products, from cellular phones to computer software to blockbuster

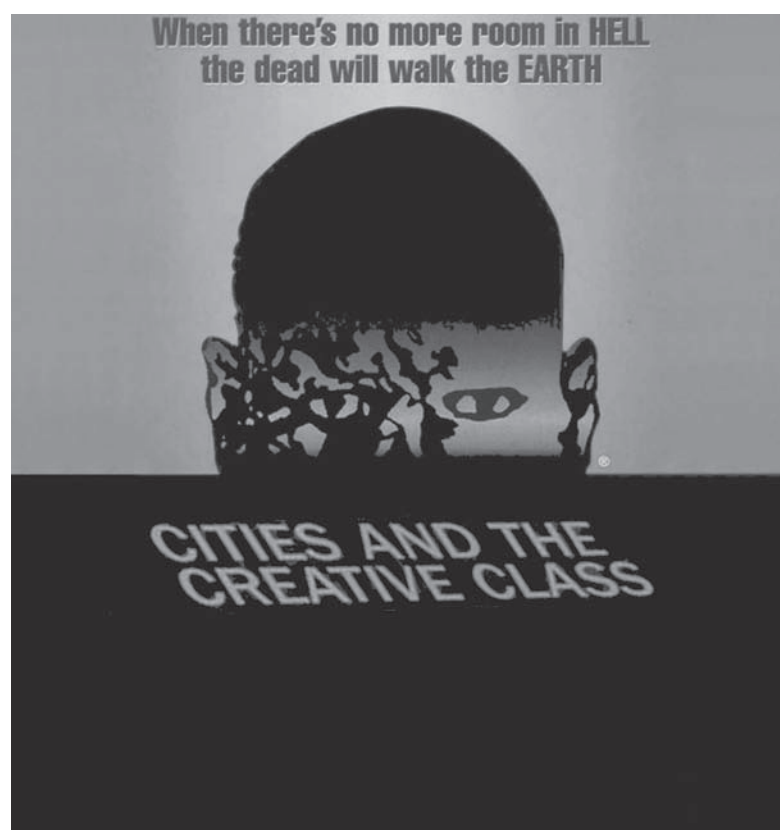
movies.”¹¹

It follows that no-one, and *nowhere*, is safe from this new competitive threat. Even powerful economies can fall prey to new forms of creative competition, which (along with the hyperbole) is said to be “heating up”.¹²

Help is, however, at hand, since Florida’s self-appointed role is not simply to disclose the new economic order. He is also a purveyor, conveniently, of winning urban strategies. Right along with the identification of policy imperatives comes a suite of new policy solutions, all designed to give the creatives what they want, while securing the position of cities within the evolving creative division of labour. Figuring out what the creatives want, and where they want to be, was a primary task of Florida’s opening salvo in the creativity debate, ‘The rise of the creative class’, 2002. This bestselling book probed the locational proclivities of the creative class using a combination of pop-culture anecdotes, focus groups with young, restless, and talented people, excruciating insights into Florida’s own creative lifestyle, and supposedly suggestive spatial correlations, for instance between gays and growth. The results – sparsely documented from a social-scientific perspective, but nevertheless emphatically stated – indicated that the creative class yearn, above all, to “validate their identities.” Creatives seek out neighbourhoods amply endowed with the kind of amenities that allow them to maintain an experientially intensive work-life balance. They are drawn to “plug and play” communities, where social entry barriers are low, where heterogeneity is actively embraced, where loose ties prevail, where there is plenty of scope for creative commingling. These are communities that creatives “can move into and put together a life – or at least a facsimile of a life – in a week”.¹³ Such diagnostically-critical conditions are signalled by conspicuous presence of gays and lesbians, designated here both as the “canaries of the creative economy” and as “harbingers of redevelopment and gentrification in distressed urban neighbourhoods”.¹⁴ Other more concrete indicators of urban edginess include “authentic” historical buildings, converted lofts, walkable streets, plenty of coffee shops, art and live-music spaces, indigenous street culture, and a range of other typical features of gentrifying, mixed-use, inner-urban neighbourhoods.

These environments serve as creative incubators. *Homo creativus* thrives on weak attachments and noncommittal relationships, most often mediated through the market. These atomized actors seem to lack families and non-market support systems, revelling instead in long hours of work and individualistic competition. This twenty-first century version of economic man may have a better social life, but he is still economic man. As a member of the creative class, Florida understands that “there is no corporation or other large institution that will take care of us – that we are truly on our own.”¹⁵ The edgy urban neighbourhood facilitates and enables this productive lifestyle, allowing the creatives to plug into the new economy and play as hard as they like. The defining characteristics of this new urban überclass are all framed in competitive terms. They are, one might say, neoliberals *dressed in black*. It takes no effort at all to translate the founding principles of the creative doctrine into just such terms.

Since it is the creatives who are the primary decision-makers in Florida’s account, then it is ultimately their choices – writ large – that shape the spatial division of creative labour, the creative urban hierarchy, and the parameters of the interurban talent war. And, “when it comes down to it, creative people choose *regions*,” Florida explains, “They think of Silicon Valley versus Cambridge, Stockholm versus Vancouver, or Sydney versus Copenhagen. The fact that many regions around the world are cultivating the attributes necessary to become creative centres makes this competition even fiercer.”¹⁶ Just like the wave of entrepreneurial urban strategies that preceded it, this form of creative interurban



‘creative class’ with hip neighbourhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere – or they’ll go the way of Detroit”.⁶ Which way, then, to the creative city?

The creativity catechism...

Routinely overstated and hyperbolic, Florida’s essential argument is that human creativity has become the engine of twenty-first century economic development, such that the competitiveness of nations and cities is increasingly rooted in the capacity to attract, retain, and “nurture” talented individuals – the newly dominant factor of production. For Florida, human creativity is the “defining feature of economic life [...] [It] has come to be valued – and systems have evolved to encourage and harness it – because new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things flow from it.”⁷ What this account lacks in causal analysis it makes up for in alliterative chutzpah. Success in the new, creative economy is down to three T’s – technology, talent, and tolerance. Technological capacity is a precondition for creative growth, but on its own is insufficient. The gist, though, is that cities with a shot at the creative big time must have a strong cluster of high-tech companies and a good university. The lifeblood of the system is the flow of talented individuals, the second T, this restless-but-critical factor of production having become the carrier of creative potential. Productive capacity is therefore located not in institutional matrices or production systems, but in the heads and hearts of creative individuals.

competition is both self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating: establishing open, plug-and-play communities that are welcoming of restive creative types becomes tantamount to both enabling and *subsidizing* the very forms of mobility that were the source of competitive anxiety in the first place. But since there is (again) only one game in town, cities had better make sure they are ready to participate, to do what is necessary, or they will certainly lose out. This is a variant on the “do it, or else” style of neoliberal urban policymaking, in which favoured strategies are translated into economic imperatives, a new-age variant of smokestack chasing.¹⁷ Again, cities must be reflexively responsive to a hypercompetitive external environment, comprising “liberalized” flows of capital, public investment, consumer dollars... and now talent workers:

“Lasting competitive advantage today will not simply amass in those countries and regions that can generate the most creative, innovative, or entrepreneurial output. The places that will be most able to absorb new energies will be those that are both open to diversity and also capable of internalizing the externalities that the creative economy gives rise to [...] The most successful places will require a *socially adaptive* capability that will enable them to pioneer new fields and innovative industries.”¹⁸

The role for government, in this context, is to invest in the creative supply side, Florida’s chameleon-like position being to sanction discretionary, pink-tinged interventions at the local scale, while demanding that big government get out of the way. “Where I share common ground with some Republicans and libertarians [is] that old-style government programs have become a huge impediment to leveraging the creative age and allowing it to emerge,” Florida explains, the more limited function of the State being to “set up the parameters in which market-based actions take place”.¹⁹ Priming the creative pump therefore becomes a task for *urban* leaders; the way forward is with “grassroots initiatives” and “community-oriented efforts”. Step forward the street-level activists of the creative age.

... and its converts

The response to the creative cities thesis amongst urban policymaking communities around the world has bordered on the ecstatic. Florida’s ideas have been picked up by mayors, regional development agencies, policy entrepreneurs, advisors, and consultants across the United States, Europe, Australasia, and parts of Asia, both in wannabe locations at the bottom of his creative league tables (which are now available in numerous countries) and in established centres like London, Toronto, and Melbourne. This “fast policy” success story may be attributable less to the revolutionary or transformative nature of the Florida thesis itself, more to its character as a minimally disruptive “soft neoliberal” fix. The story is, in many ways, a familiar one, though the cast of characters has changed. National governments just have to get out of the way for the creative economy to flourish; effective urban responses call for bold leadership and vision, but some kind of response is essential for any city that wants to stay in the game; self-managing and hyperactive creatives, as bearers of creative market forces, will look after the rest, so earning their status as privileged urban subjects.

In this neoliberalized urban terrain, a receptive and wide audience has effectively been pre-constituted for the kinds of market-reinforcing, property- and promotion-based, growth-oriented, and gentrification-friendly policies that have been repackaged under the creativity rubric. The creative cities policy fix can be deployed to accessorize extant, market-based urban development agendas, with the minimum of interference to established interests and constituencies. At root, it simply adds a livability-lifestyle component to the established urban competitiveness stance. The typical mayor is likely to see few downsides to making the city safe for the creative class. Establishment power elites have

little to fear from conspicuous urban consumption, gen-x marketing campaigns, key-worker attraction strategies, and gentrification-with-public-art. A creativity strategy is easily bolted on to business-as-usual urban-development policies, while providing additional ideological cover for market-driven or state-assisted programs of gentrification. Inner-city embourgeoisement, in the creativity script, is represented as a necessary prerequisite for economic development: *hey presto*, thorny political problem becomes competitive asset!

Creative cities policies, of course, would hardly be spreading like wildfire if they represented a revolutionary challenge to the neoliberal status quo. In fact, they are being stamped out cookie-cutter style across the urban landscape, spanning a quite remarkable range of settings²⁰ having become policies of choice, in particular, for those left-leaning mayors who have learned to live with, if not love, the market order. Nominally bespoke creativity strategies can be purchased from consultants in practically any mid-sized city these days, or they can be lifted off the shelf from countless websites and urban regeneration conferences. These are almost ideal products for the fast-policy distribution systems that have evolved in the past two decades: both the rationale and the design parameters of the policy are essentially portable – just make sure that each plan contains at least a dash of local cultural “authenticity”, while nodding to the right “grassroots” constituencies in each city.

To take just one of dozens of (very) similar examples: Michigan’s recently enacted Cool Cities program, derived directly from the creativity playbook, retasks state funds to the goal of localized gentrification, hipster-style, in the hope that this will attract the creative class. Beneath the rhetoric of avant-garde economic development, this entails the public subsidy of various kinds of “creative” collective goods and infrastructure projects, focused exclusively on locations with *demonstrated* development potential (a.k.a. “happening”, gentrifying neighbourhoods). Making Michigan’s cities attractive to the creative class has entailed a youth-oriented marketing program; extensive learning from other cities and from creative citizens themselves (given that “government cannot create ‘cool’”); and a bundle of mostly repackaged policies aimed at the rehabilitation of historic buildings (specifically, theatres, galleries, mixed-use housing), farmers’ markets, streetscaping and public art, physical infrastructure development, façade improvements, outdoor recreation facilities, greenspace, parks, pavilions, and, if necessary, demolition.²¹

Posing in fashionable shades to launch the program, Michigan’s Governor, Jennifer Granholm, insisted that it was essential that this struggling, auto-industry state catch the *next* wave of economic development. Michigan has been experiencing an “exodus” of young, highly educated people in recent years, as “large numbers of talented workers have fled the state in search of employment”.²² According to the creativity script, the way to alleviate Michigan’s economic decline is to reverse this critical flow of talent, since in the new knowledge economy jobs follow workers, not the other way around. Curiously, even though Michigan’s creative class decamped “in search of employment,” we are expected to believe that they will be attracted *back* by enhanced urban environments, and *then* the state’s economy will revive:

“Given the right mix of services and amenities, this group will ‘vote with their feet’ and relocate to vibrant, walkable, mixed-use communities. Attracted by a talented, diverse workforce, business will follow”.²³

The target demographic for the Cool Cities program is defined as college-educated young professionals in core fields like science and engineering, art and design, entertainment, computing, and the media, whose defining characteristics include a “preference for lifestyle,” distinctive purchasing patterns (reflecting individuality and self-statement), and above all, *mobility*:

“[T]oday’s young professional workforce is more

interested in working as a means of experiencing and enjoying their lifestyle than their counterparts in decades past. This group is increasingly mobile, and in order to attract and retain them, cities have to change their paradigm of physical and social development. The city itself has to be attractive, not only to business, but also to the workforce.”²⁴

But will young Michiganders, who left the state in search of better career opportunities (apparently having had their fill of the lifestyle options of Flint, Kalamazoo, and Saginaw), *really* be tempted back by the policy-induced trendification of their old neighbourhoods? Even if the goal of “making Michigan the ‘coolest’ state in the nation” is a realistic one, it sits rather awkwardly with the sobering realities of structural economic decline and public-sector downsizing in a state hardly renowned as a hipster haven.²⁵ Michigan has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, the auto industry has entered a(nother) major phase of restructuring, and the rate of job loss in the state has been characterized by local commentators as “staggering”.²⁶ The city’s economic trajectory has been described by David Littman, chief economist at Comerica Bank, as a “graveyard spiral”.²⁷

Creative cities policies would hardly be spreading like wildfire if they represented a challenge to the neoliberal status quo. In fact, they are being stamped out cookie-cutter style across the urban landscape.

Inhospitable territory for creative cities strategies? Apparently not. In some respects, the level of enthusiasm for creativity makeovers may be inversely proportional to the scale of the economic challenge confronting local policymakers. Even in the rustbelt capitals, the creativity cult has been recruiting new members. CreateDetroit, an offshoot of the state’s Cool Cities program established in 2003, characteristically self-describes as a “grassroots organization”, despite sponsorship from the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Governor’s Office, the City of Detroit, Wayne State University, Detroit Renaissance, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, and corporations like Apple and SBC. CreateDetroit has been striving to turn around the flagging fortunes of Motown by making it a “destination city” for the creative class. Detroit was ranked 39th out of 49 major cities in Florida’s original “creativity index,” but as the creative economist himself has pointed out, this means that the city has more creative *potential* than almost anywhere in the nation (see Klein 2004b).²⁸ CreateDetroit is pursuing similar strategies to a range of other (newly designated) creative bottomfeeders, like Memphis and Tampa Bay, who were similarly spurred to action by their lowly rankings in Florida’s widely publicized league tables.²⁹ These include periodic events that splice the arts and urban development; lobbying for creative investment; creatively themed marketing and promotion activities; and hobnobbing initiatives like “Connect Four,” where artists, writers, designers and media types can “meet, mingle, hunt, gather, network, and play”.

“The idea behind CreateDetroit,” a founding member explained, “is to create a long-range

plan, focused on making the Detroit region a magnet for new economy talent. The stakes are high. Those regions that do not flourish in the new creative economy will fail, according to Carnegie Mellon University professor Richard Florida”.³⁰ A formative early step for CreateDetroit was to invest in one of the professor’s two-day “regional transformation” workshops, photographs from which adorn the group’s web site. Following a well-established methodology, the event featured a range of local performance artists, plenty of feel-good provincial pride (along with *I am Detroit* t-shirts), and a 350-person audience heavily tilted towards the arts and cultural communities, together with local policymakers and advocates. Florida’s polished performance was greeted with enthusiasm, and there was widespread support for his populist rendering of “pro-people” economic development. His energetically delivered message, that Detroit was losing out in the balance of trade in creativity, focused attention on the out-migration of “talented” individuals, while validating a distinctive set of arts-intensive investments in the city. An irreparable failure of the computer system (and its backup) unfortunately marred the audience-participation segment of the workshop, in which attendees were invited to vote on their city’s creative strengths and weakness prior to revelations of the “actual data” – perhaps calling attention to some of Detroit’s deficits on the first T of technology. But most of the participants, especially those in the (previously-neglected) arts and cultural communities, seem to have left invigorated by Florida’s “call to arms to take themselves seriously as an economic force”.³¹

“The purpose of the event,” Florida insisted, was not for “me and my team to come to Detroit and prescribe fixes. What will help Detroit is for swelling grassroots efforts like CreateDetroit to say, ‘This is where we want to be in the future. This is what we plan to do to get there’”.³² However, some noted that, for all his talk of “reach[ing] down and harnessing that energy,” Florida failed to offer the hungry audience “a single concrete suggestion”.³³ Others were left wondering whether the creative backwash, should it ever reach the shores of Lake Michigan, would really lift all boats.

Creativity strategies have been crafted to co-exist with these problems, not to solve them ... the creativity fix begins to look less like a solution to, and more like a symptom...

Buzz aside, most recognized that this was in many respects a canned presentation, and that Florida’s troupe would soon be pulling “up their tent stakes, and mov[ing] on to their next destination”.³⁴

“Florida had the air of a motivational speaker, claiming that Detroit has more raw potential than any other city in the nation. He gave a brief synopsis of his concept of what makes a city livable, vibrant place – but other than the obligatory White Stripes and Eminem references, the speech could have been delivered in Anyville, USA.”³⁵

In a sense, of course, the speech *had* been delivered in Anyville, a generic location for which it was carefully crafted. Scores of cities have heard, and often responded to, the same basic message, with each being urged to value – and valorize – whatever creative assets they might have to hand. (So, the creativity tonic for Milwaukee is ginned up with a dash of Liberace and the Violent Femmes, while Baltimore’s makeover references Billie Holiday and Frank Zappa – what creative-city consultants now routinely decant as the “audio identities” of place.) According to Dr. Florida’s prescription, practically any city can respond to the creativity treatment, at least as long as their civic leaders “get it”.³⁶

On the face of it at least, Detroit’s “hip hop mayor”, Kwame Kilpatrick, still under 40 and the proud wearer of a diamond ear stud, gets it. The Mayor offered a fulsome introduction to Florida when he came to Detroit. (On this occasion, the Mayor chose not to mention his opposition to same-sex marriage, which would not earn him high marks on the Tolerance scorecard.) While the realistic prospects of a creativity-fuelled economic turnaround in Detroit may be remote, the city can hardly be faulted for its willingness to give anything a try. Its population has fallen by half since the mid-1950s; its unemployment rate is twice the state’s average and getting on for three times the national average; 72 percent of the city’s public school children receive free school meals (up from 61 percent in 2001); and “white flight has become bright fright, with families and people earning more than \$50 000 a year leading the way out of town”.³⁷ For the city’s government, sustained population loss, coupled with a declining tax base, has been fueling an unprecedented and unresolved fiscal crisis: Mayor Kilpatrick’s administration hovers on the brink of receivership, having cut bus services, closed the city zoo and 34 schools, and laid off one in ten of the municipal workforce. The City has also been considering closing “non-essential departments,” including – note unfortunate inconsistencies – the Department of Culture, Art & Tourism, and turning off street lights. Its paralyzing three-year deficit amounts to just under one quarter of annual general fund revenues, while the first round of serious cuts has been said to threaten “a vicious cycle for a city already on the edge”.³⁸

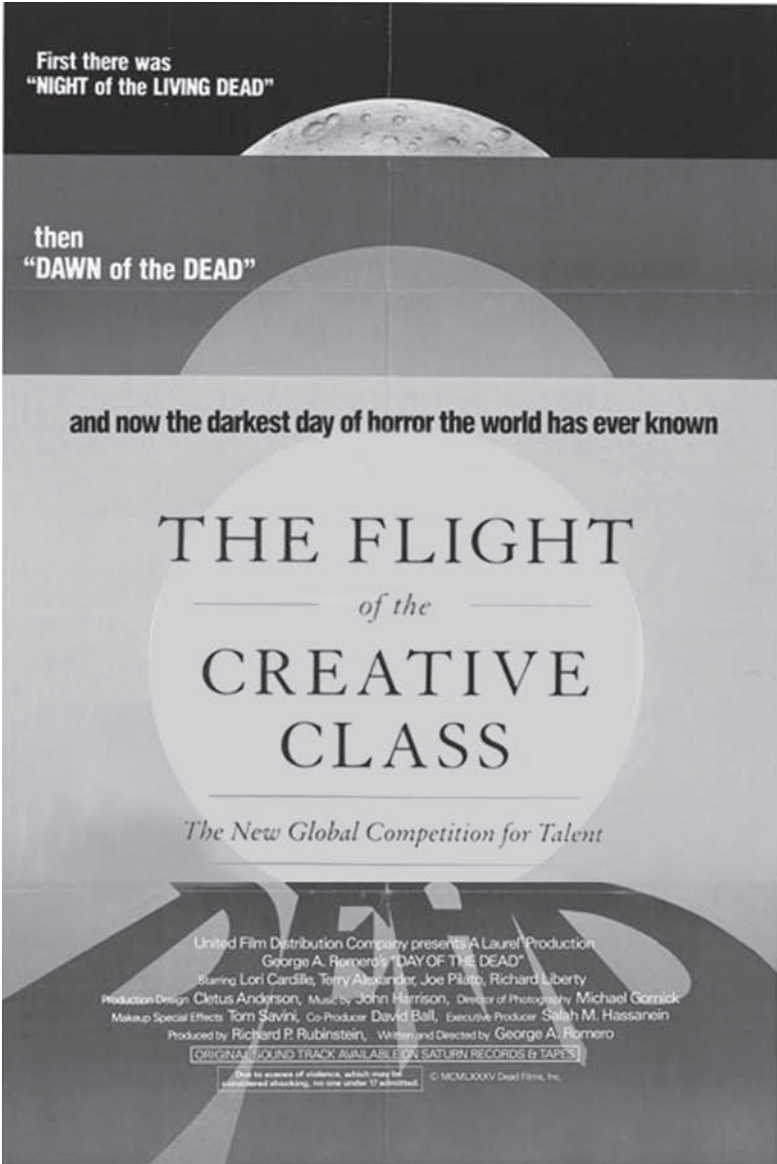
Compared to the usual package of corporate tax breaks and big-box development subsidies, cool-cities policies certainly look like a break with the past. While there may be novelty in urban policymakers sharing the stage with

fashion designers and hip-hop artists, none of this makes the causal relationships between buzz and economic growth any more real. But none of this will prevent cities, with few other realistic options, from trying. Recall, however, how entrepreneurial urban strategies proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s, facilitated by competitive leverage and the weak emulation of “winning” formulas, quickly stacking the odds against even the most enthusiastic of converts.³⁹ Coming on the heels of this experience, the creativity fix also seduces local actors with the no-less false promise that any *and every* city can win in the battle for talent. Under such circumstances, the first-mover advantages for a few quickly descend into zero- or negative-sum games: more players pursue the same mobile resources, the price of “success” rises, the chances of positive outcomes fall. In cities like Detroit, the odds look daunting. This said, there remains plenty of enthusiasm amongst the activists at CreateDetroit for what they are calling “Plan B [...] [making] sure the talent comes here”.⁴⁰ Plan A was automobile manufacturing.

The Cool Cities program may indeed be an “economic development strategy that puts ‘creative people’ first”,⁴¹ but in cities like Detroit these look like perversely indulgent priorities. Should the Motor City really be investing its dwindling tax revenues in a market-following means of underwriting middle-class house prices and consumption desires, with distributional consequences that seem certain to be socially and spatially regressive? Entrenched problems like structural unemployment, residential inequality, working poverty, and racialized exclusion are barely even addressed by this form of cappuccino urban politics. According to urban historian, Matt Lassiter, “the Rust Belt capital of Detroit has basically adopted the Sunbelt strategy of Atlanta and Los Angeles: ignore social problems of segregation and poverty, and instead try to transform the image rather than the reality of the central city”.⁴² Creativity strategies have been crafted to *co-exist* with these problems, not to solve them. It should come as no surprise, then, that the creative capitals exhibit higher rates of socioeconomic inequality than other cities, as has been belatedly acknowledged by Florida himself.⁴³ This awkward correlation is quite consistent, of course, with the argument that creativity strategies are predicated upon, and constitutively realized in the context of, uneven modes of urban growth and neoliberal politics. In this light, the creativity fix begins to look less like a solution to, and more like a symptom of, Detroit’s problems.

Conclusion: creativity redux

Beneath the creative rhetoric, Florida presents a familiar urban-economic development story: construct new urban governance networks around growth-oriented goals, compete aggressively for mobile economic resources and government funds, respond in formulaic ways to external threats, talk up the prospects of success, and, whatever you do, don’t buck the market. The emphasis on the mobilization of elite policy communities around growth-first urban policy objectives is nothing new, but whereas the entrepreneurial cities chased jobs, the creative cities pursue talent workers; the entrepreneurial cities craved investment, now the creative cities yearn for buzz; while entrepreneurial cities boasted of their postfordist flexibility, the creative cities trade on the cultural distinction of *cool*. Notwithstanding some conventional neoliberal frames of reference, the creativity fix is also a distinctive development vision, tailored to appeal to left-tilting mayors, with its easily digestible cocktail of cultural liberalism and economic rationality. Moreover, it is very much a *mobilizing* discourse, which actively *reconstitutes* external competitive threats in novel terms, while pointedly defining new *responses*, together with new roles for an enlarged network of urban policy protagonists and beneficiaries. It establishes a fresh set of “models” of urban development, distilling the essence of their success into a series of portable policy routines and mobile rationalities. It nudges urban leaders to



contemplate new forms of fiscally modest, supply-side investment, mostly targeted at economically secure residents of neighbourhoods in which property prices are already on the up.

The seductiveness of creativity strategies must be understood in terms of their basic complementarity with prevailing neoliberal development fixes, their compatibility with discretionary, selective, and symbolic supply-side policymaking, and their conformity with the attendant array of development interests. Creativity strategies presume, work with, and subtly remake the neoliberalized terrain of urban politics, placing commodified assets like the arts and street culture into the sphere of interurban competition, enabling the formation of new local political channels and constituencies, and constituting new objects and subjects of urban governance. Creativity strategies work upon, indeed celebrate, mobile and adaptive creative subjects, making the case for public investment in their preferred urban milieu, while shifting the primary focus of proactive governance towards the “needs” of a techno-bohemian slice of the middle-class. Taking the flexible/insecure/unequal economy as given, these post-progressive urban strategies lionize a creative elite while offering the residualized majority the meager consolation of crumbs from the creative table. They enforce soft-disciplinary modes of creative governmentality based on mandatory individualism, relentless innovation, and 24/7 productivity. Say what you will about the fuzzy causality in Florida’s model, its central message has certainly struck a chord. But as Detroit writer Carey Wallace, among others, has begun to wonder, does the creativity craze represent “a new truth, or something people want very much to believe?”⁴⁴

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Notes

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7. Richard Florida, *The rise of the creative class*, p. 21.
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9. Richard Florida, *The rise of the creative class*, p. ix.
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28. See Sarah Klein, “Hipster economics”, *Metro Times* 25 February 2004.

29. See Peck, *Cities and the creative class*.
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32. Quoted in Carey Wallace, “Does civic creativity pay”, *Metro Times* 25 February 2004, p. 2.
33. Sarah Klein, “Creation station”, *Metro Times* 10 March 2004, p. 1.
34. Sousanis, p. 3.
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Tyranny of the Ad Hoc

John Barker

The nature and composition of institutions-with-power, and whether they matter at all, has been absent from modern communist thinking in the ‘developed world’. Absent in some part from the belief that thinking that such institutions matter at all is inherently reformist. Or perhaps because they are seen to have few tangible consequences. In a period of massively unequal globalization, formal institutions with at least nominal accountability have, with a few exceptions, been sidelined or become expendable. Power has shifted to a raft of ad hoc outfits with grandiose names and a lack of even nominal accountability. Their effect is often diffuse, and not immediately visible. Capitalism’s protectorate demands unhindered freedom of action, happy to impose rules on others while dodging any on itself; slippery to its core. All this matters and especially now when in the economic sphere voluntary agreements, ad hoc oversight, and a lack of accountability has come to the fore.

Weasel Words

One prominent evasive tool of the protectorate is its use of weasel words. ‘Flexibility’, for example, used to have a virtuous ring to it – the supple body, the give-and-take needed for civilized living, the possibility of working only when it’s convenient – but not now, not for a long while. Rather, a change of meaning reflects how one-way and rigidified the hierarchy of give-and-take has become. It is now a virtue for exploiters. One in which any assertion of the rights of labour is automatically categorized as inflexible behaviour, and in which exploiters and their protectorate can never be pinned down, never be responsible for any thing specific. This is not simply ‘double-speak’, rather, double-speak has become so pervasive and marketing language so dominant. And, like Humpty Dumpty, who asserted that words would mean what *he* wanted them to mean, marketing agents and their masters don’t want flexibility to mean anything other than what *they* want it to mean. When the World Health Organization, an arm of the UN, published the document ‘The Use of Flexibilities in TRIPS by Developing Countries: Can They Promote Access to Medicines’, the USA demanded an immediate review of WHO publication policy because the document had been critical of the US’s interpretation of the World Trade Organization’s TRIPS agreement. Subsequently, at a January 2008 Executive board meeting it was proposed that all WHO publications should be censored, subject to clearance by a Guidelines Review Committee.

There are, then, flexibilities and flexibilities. The World Trade Organization has been exemplary in its double standards. Talking of their agreements, Robert Hunter Wade, Professor of Political Economy at LSE, pointed out that “they are vague at points where vagueness benefits the developed countries, and precise at points where precision works against developing countries.” This has been especially the case with intellectual property rights enforcement, whereas the promise of technology transfer has been smothered in vagueness. Like a character in Henry Green’s novel ‘Nothing’, the most powerful forces in the world “take refuge in a vast quagmire of vagueness when at all pressed.” When George W. Bush was pushing the UN Security Council for a vote to invade Iraq, UN President Lamine bravely demanded benchmarks by which Iraqi compliance/non-compliance could be judged. Such vagueness has also been the Western response to the number estimates of Iraqi conscript deaths in the Gulf War, and of Iraqi civilian deaths since the 2003 invasion.¹ It is also the case whenever a commitment to reaching targets is made, and especially in the matter of greenhouse gas emissions. When climate change negotiations began in earnest, President Bush the First made

sure that there was an inbuilt ambiguity regarding both principles and target. And just as there is flexibility as to what is flexible, there is an equal partiality when it comes to what is measurable. The McKinsey management conglomerate, with a toehold in every ad hoc pie has a mantra that says ‘whatever can be measured can be mangaed.’ This refers, in one form or another, to a measuring of the intensity of labour and surplus value extraction. Other things, uncomfortable realities, however, are not measured.

In a world dominated by the language of marketing, and by strategic vagueness, rhetorical demands for ‘transparency’ are just that, rhetorical, and until recently applied as selectively as WTO rules. Its sibling, ‘accountability’, is also applied selectively, and has been still further undermined by a ‘tyranny of the ad hoc’. That is, power being exerted by institutions that are unelected and have been created with confident self-importance, approval openly from themselves, and murky funding. As has the virtuous meaning of the ‘ad hoc’, with its promise of spontaneity and the coming together of disinterested people across boundaries. In reality it has meant an ever-increasing plethora of think-tanks, Foundations, public-private partnerships, NGOs, and wholly unelected national and international bodies like The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Chatham House or the G7/8 itself, the very inclusion/exclusion of Russia revealing its ad hoc nature. These are not just unaccountable: they preclude negotiation which is anathema to exploiters and their protectorate, since there is always the danger that they might open a can of worms, notions of fairness and justice; they are invariably undemocratic set-ups and are agencies of exclusion. These ad hoc set-ups are pervasive both nationally and internationally.

The British Version

When it no longer mattered, the unctuous Tony Blair was criticised for having run a ‘sofa cabinet’ in which informal groupings took major governmental decisions. The most publicised came from a civil service mandarin with an ingrained belief in constitutional protocol and the semblance of checks and balances on executive power. Another came from David Runciman² who compared it ironically to the 1970s National Health Service. Ironic because New Labour described the ‘old NHS’ as Stalinist whereas in reality it was a matter of who you knew; comparable, because “Blair runs his own administration...with everything depending on finding yourself on the right sofa at the right time, with as little as possible written down, no proper minutes, everything geared towards reaching a workable consensus among colleagues who understood how things worked on the inside.” Altogether, in both set-ups, “no one was ultimately accountable,” and when it came to health policy, it was a case of the “wishful thinking that passes for health policy research in the prime minister’s circle.” “Wishful thinking” being one consequence of unaccountability, and, of the absence of any space or desire for critical voices.

This unaccountability is far more pervasive than political government itself, and, given the fabled ad hoc nature of the British Constitution, that much easier to get away with. I have given a sketch of its scope in ‘The High and Mighty’³, with Dame Pauline Neville-Jones as exemplar of someone, an ex-civil servant, who holds positions of power across the public-private spectrum, with its voluntary agreements, political advisers, think-tanks, quangos and, most concretely, PFI deals. Voluntary agreements by sectors of capitalism and self-policed regulation are not new, but the same justificatory weasel words described by Nigel Balchin in his London blitz novel ‘Darkness

Falls from the Air’ are still being used by the food industry in avoiding mandatory targets in relation to obesity, and even by cheeky bankers. An exemplary case in 2007, just as the contours of the financial crisis to come were becoming visible, and described by Philip Inman (Guardian July 18th) was a report into private equity firms conducted by a former chairman of Morgan Stanley, a subsequently failed-and-rescued investment bank. The report rejected demands for closer scrutiny of the huge fees it enjoyed and called for a voluntary code of conduct in explicit opposition to clear, enforceable regulation.

Quangos and think-tanks are not new either, rather they have increased in number, and beyond military realpolitik in scope This increase has happened in tandem with New Labour developing the trend towards the monopolisation of political power by the executive. Most of these ad hoc outfits involve people who know ‘how things work on the inside’ and share ideological views of the world; whether pro-Americanism, like the British-American Project for the Successor Generation, or blind faith in business managerialism. There are isolated demands for accountability, as in the case of Lord John Birt’s role as a government adviser, but they remain isolated incidents. There are numerous ‘public-private partnerships’ like the Carbon Trust, a player in the murky world of carbon trading, or there is the Information Assurance Advisory Council. Meanwhile what are essentially public-private schools are becoming the norm, conditioned by charities and/or religious affiliation.

The Sandwiched State

This is how ‘development’ policy manifests itself in Britain, but a far greater impetus for documenting internal ad hoc domination has come from radical intellectuals in NGO-laden Africa. NGOs cover a multitude of sins and virtues. The Adam Smith Institute for example, a think tank of free market fanatics, was sub-contracted to work on the privatisation element of structural adjustment. How NGOs came into being, by and for whom, how democratic, varies a great deal. Many are self-organised by the oppressed; others provided the tools for such groups with no strings attached. In the context of debt-coerced ‘structural adjustment’ policies however, many have played a key role, wittingly or not, in the imposition of those policies with their neoliberal agenda. This happens when the state in the affected countries is deprived of much of its role of responsibility to its citizens, reduced to being a reliable re-payer of foreign debt and imposing the social discipline that requires.

In these circumstances the role of NGOs is problematic: when they are usually financed by debt-receiving countries; have their own organisational dynamics; are themselves largely unaccountable; and when multilateral agencies like the World Bank directly incorporate NGO elites, or proxy agencies financed by the Bank, like Civicus.

They look especially problematic when the patrons of structural adjustment have come to blame the misery they themselves have caused by these policies, and their failure even within their own terms (the ‘trickle-down’ fantasy), exclusively on state corruption. To this end, they have come up with a new, ready-made ideology of ‘good governance’. This was especially so in the brief period when the World Bank was headed by that righteous killer Paul Wolfowitz. He spoke of nothing else during his time there, but it was very much on behalf of the Bank, and consistent with its ideology. Not only did corruption *per se* – or as the Bank put it, a lack of ‘good governance’ – come to rationalise the failure of structural adjustment, it aimed at pioneering a further stripping of state capacity.



This needs qualifying. There are many brave and capable humanists working within large institutional NGOs, and especially those working in emergency relief who I saw for myself at work during the period of Ranamo terror in Mozambique.⁴ But I'm especially sceptical of the fashionable downplaying of such emergency relief with talk that goes, "we must not just respond, but work on the long-term causes of these emergency situations", for it is exactly with such goals, that it substitutes itself for the capacity of the state which at least has some accountability, however nominal. And I'm sceptical despite there being a group of think-tanks (The NGO Watch of the American Enterprise Institute, the American Rushford Report and the NGO Monitor in Jerusalem) devoted to monitoring development NGOs for any signs of challenging Western hegemony.⁵ The irony in this situation really takes the biscuit; unaccountable, privately funded think-tanks keep surveillance on NGOs using NGO's own lack of accountability as cover for political attacks on them. But this, along with donor pressure means that NGOs are even more likely to fulfil their state-replacement role, whatever their original misgivings.⁶

The African state, formed in large part by colonial rule which actively encouraged 'tribalism' as a set of hierarchic chieftaincies, has often had morbid dynamics. Elites have used ancestral traditions – as created by colonial powers – to use the notion of African consensual decision-making in order to "refuse to concede to the formal representation of the interests of cultural solidarities."⁷ And of course there is corruption, pervasive in some parts; African fiction writers have been mapping the debilitating frustration it produces for years. But this too needs qualification. Corruption is not unique to the public sector, nor the "less developed world", nor of 'human nature'; rather, it is characteristic of unaccountability. Indeed the rich world's complicity in, and benefit from such corruption is well known. It has taken the form of siphoned off millions into non-transparent Western banks, and, insidiously, in the sale of unnecessary armaments in the case of Tanzania, and accompanied by bribes in South Africa.⁸ On the other hand, unscrupulous elites have used the IMF as both a punchbag and an excuse in domestic politics to impose austerity programs they themselves favoured. These 'structural adjustment' policies had as a main target, public sector wages. Cuts directed against them not only prompted new waves of 'brain drain' but were self-fulfilling in regards to corruption. Bureaucratic corruption and teacher absenteeism were predictable results.

The Opportunists

The advent of structural adjustment, a policy of reducing state capacity in favour of an ad hoc group of agencies, was a consequence of policy decisions in the West, and an ideology that soon followed to justify them which originally went under the name Monetarism.⁹ It was an ideology used partially; useful in the attack on wages identified as the cause of inflation. Partially, because 'Keynesianism' was not thrown overboard, rather it became one of corporate welfare, of military budgets and personal indebtedness. Capitalism is necessarily an opportunistic mode of production. It uses whatever is to hand whether it be ideology or what might appear to

be adverse circumstances. Thus US inflation, in part a consequence of the war against Vietnam, prompted the decision to break the relationship between gold and the dollar. This had two related consequences: the fiction of 'the independence of money' was broken, as was the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. This system was not capitalist utopianism writ large, that notion, as presented by Keynes in the form of the 'Clearing Union', had been knocked on the head at Bretton Woods itself. It did however involve governments deciding on changes to their currency values when deemed necessary in negotiation with the International Monetary Fund, which also meant there was a degree of inflexibility in exchange rate movement. Since then floating rates have meant that the currencies of countries where the demands of the investor class did not monopolise economic policy, could be attacked massively, at speed, and, most of all, without negotiation.

Soon afterwards, the emergence of OPEC as a real force and the first qualitative jump in the price of oil appeared at first as a crisis for the capitalist economy, but soon became instead an opportunity for this opportunist mode of production and its protectorate, rather than for the 'less developed' world. It's not that this world which had organised itself in the Non-Aligned movement did not see the opportunity. Taking a leading role, the Algerian government – as an oil producer itself – and the movement as a whole, articulated clear demands in negotiations under the auspices of UNCTAD (the UN's Trade and Development arm) for a New International Economic Order. With the perhaps predictable connivance of the Saudis and the pro-active diplomacy of Henry Kissinger – the West's front man for the torturers of the time – UNCTAD was by-passed. When, in 1987, UNCTAD attempted to restart negotiations to make global North-South trade more fair, the institution was dismissed as 'ideological' by the Reagan Administration. Ideological! No beating them for sheer brazen cheek. And followed up with vindictive ideological zeal by the USA's withdrawal from all International Commodity Agreements which had provided some stability and predictability for farmers.¹⁰

Back in the 1970s even the IMF, a 'Bretton Woods institution' which along with the World Bank survived the end of Bretton Woods as a system, was sidelined. The 're-cycling' of petrodollars was a thoroughly privatized affair. The institution only made a comeback in the 1980s to take on the role of debt-collection enforcer when the profits made with petro-dollar loans, desperate for outlets, resulted in a 'debt crisis' centred on Latin America. The strategy was that IMF loans would encourage private lending to resume on the grounds that IMF 'conditionality' – prototype structural adjustment policies – would do the job of making conditions conducive to profitable investment by policies that attacked the public sector and held down wages by pushing for export-led growth. This global policeman role, different to its original role of managing Balances of Payment, came and went as required. What's more, it was restricted to this role, the crucial decision taken in the international monetary system in the 1980's, the Plaza Agreement to 'manage' a fall in the value of the dollar, was made by a few finance ministers, and it worked although nothing formal had been agreed on paper. This, since it was a balance of payments problem, should have been IMF work, but in effect use of this institution in the interests

of global capital was itself *flexible*.

The IMF only became a significant actor again with another crisis, that of East Asian currencies in the 1997-8 period. Its role was rightly criticized for turning a "dangerous situation into a calamitous one", as Jeffrey Sachs put it, making the repayment of foreign investors paramount. The policies this involved exacerbated the crisis by publicly closing banks, raising interest rates and tightening credit in return for the stamped-with-approval credit the Fund provided, which was needed to deal with a liquidity crisis. Even then its role had to be supplemented at the end of '97 when its original package was in danger of failing to prevent a South Korean default.¹¹ The IMF's use was, rather, to open up Asian capital markets to foreign finance while, as Francois Godement said, it "conveniently takes the blame and serves as a handy shield for the principals, should events turn sour." Convenient for Western finance capital and in perverse fashion, for free-market true believers. At its 1997 annual meeting in Hong Kong when the crisis was still just a blip, Milton Friedman the Monetarist guru announced that it had outlived its purpose: it had, he said, become a lender of last resort to countries "making the same old mistakes of government interference." A political protégé, Jack Kemp, attacked the Fund's handling of the crisis and demanded a comprehensive deregulation of Asian economies as its 'conditionality'. Though I'm loath to make analogies, these true believers do rather resemble the racist Jewish settlers in occupied Palestine. They are functional to Zionism, in creating facts on the ground, and making mainstream Zionism look reasonable in comparison, but are repressed if their demands and actions run contrary to core interests.¹² The free market variety of fanatic put pressure on how the Fund should act, and in the event, as Kemp must have known, he got what he wanted while keeping his ideological hands clean. Not so difficult when the USA itself applied pressure by playing games with the Fund's own funding.

The usefulness of the IMF as structured, was twofold and this was appreciated by the USA. The pressure it exerted on Japan to abandon its proposal for an Asian Monetary Fund at the time was one indication of this appreciation. Then at the IMF/World Bank conference when things had quietened down in the autumn of 1998, proposals made by the then President Chirac of France to reform the Fund were similarly shot down. They centred on the demand that its Interim Committee be transformed from a *consensus-based* system into a fully-fledged decision-making body in which voting would replace the consensus-based system. Consensus decision-making is usually conducive to the tyranny of the ad hoc, in that it hides the way that such decisions represent the interests of the most powerful, and smothers critical voices, and the Chirac proposal was seen to undermine the USA-backed creation of an ad hoc "Group of 22". This insistence mirrored the USA attitude to the demands for a global financial architecture in the wake of the East Asian crisis. All it wanted was "*an informal taskforce*" looking into regulatory possibilities, hoping that the impetus for reform would pass, as it did, before serious issues like offshore banking and capital market liberalisation were raised.

illustrations by Paul Bommer
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Money Talks

Some 40 years ago one of the most important texts of the period was ‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’. It was written in the early days of the Women’s Movement at the point at which discussion groups were on the point of becoming both more organised and activist. It has since been smothered in ahistorical Foucault-derived treacle in which self-policing and hidden modes of policing are presented as integral to the human condition, but the text’s purpose at the moment of organisational transition when it was written, was to warn of the dangers that informal organisation might give rise to. It was one in which hidden power could be exerted by informal groupings within such organisations, especially so in *consensus-based* decision-making. Its materialist analysis suggested that such informal groupings with their implicit power would arise from unequal power relations like those that might, for example, be exerted by founder members.

In the case of the IMF and the World Bank, unequal power relations were constitutionally established. More generally, the tyranny of the ad hoc depends on unequal access to money, allied to the neoliberal shrinking of the state’s welfare capacity.

Think tanks have money, usually from very rich donors (‘philanthropists’) and Foundations. Foundations are themselves products of corporate wealth. And charities, which in the UK and USA have been encouraged and devised to fill in the space left by cuts to that shrinking of state capacity, are increasingly dependent on religious or ideological affiliation.

The same pattern is observable at international level. We’ve already seen how the UN’s World Health Organization is being subjected to censorship. It is also being financially outweighed and undermined by unaccountable entities. The Gates Foundation is the largest of these bringing with it executives from Microsoft and other corporations. It is neither transparent nor accountable, with many of its grants based on informal networking; it is favourable to the ubiquitous McKinsey consulting group and, apart from its own programmes, has great influence on the WHO itself.¹³ Similarly the Global Fund for AIDS TB and Malaria, funded by the Gates Foundation, depends for local implementation on the equally ubiquitous PriceWaterhouseCoopers and KPMG, both global accountancy oligopolies.

Foundations are especially anti-democratic. As described by Robert Arno, “they represent relatively unregulated and unaccountable concentrations of power and wealth which buy talent, promote causes, and, in effect, establish an agenda of what merits society’s attention. They serve as ‘cooling out’ agencies, delaying and preventing more radical change.” When Mrs Brundtland was head of the WHO she encouraged public-private partnerships, with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation which was instrumental in setting up the Initiative on Public Private Partnerships for Health. Many of these partnerships are dependent on the Gates Foundation. In addition there is the usual plethora of NGOs and bilateral donors which, all together, make for a global health industry operating a loosely connected portfolio of initiatives and programmes. Zambia for instance has fifteen donor agencies in the health sector alone. What it also means is that the World Health Organization is being by-passed, while its funding situation means that instead of it being at least a nominally democratic UN agency, it is in danger of becoming an instrument to serve donor interests. And as if this were not enough, the World Bank with its neoliberal agenda has itself become a leading financier of health projects.

Institutional Steeplechase

The World Bank is the more consistently powerful of the Bretton Woods institutions. Its loyalty to the protectorate has never been in doubt. When it immediately ceased any loans to Chile on the election of Salvador Allende in 1970, for

example, and then to Sandinista Nicaragua. Its importance can be gauged by the USA’s recent insistence on its absolute right to choose the Bank’s next boss against pressure from a coalition of 10 developing countries. An internal memo from the USA leaked to *The Observer* is very revealing.¹⁴ “The arrangement that exists regarding the nationality of the President of the Bank is an *informal agreement* among shareholders and we cannot support an option paper for the annual meeting that includes concrete options with respect to the selection process of the President.”

The IMF’s power, on the other hand, is ironically conditional; to be used or not used as required. True; the ad hoc characteristic of ‘consensus’ decision-making remains intact, as does the secrecy and thus unaccountability of its proceedings. But now, at the very moment of perhaps the biggest ever monetary crisis of capitalism, its role is minor at best, just as it was in the crucial 1980s Plaza deal. Its own funds are low, alternatives like the Chiang Mai Initiative are developing, and it has been reduced to ‘helping out’ relatively small players; Ireland, Hungary and Iceland. The bigger role has been taken by ad hoc central banker meetings and the G7, which itself has graduated from the ad hoc to institution by sheer longevity.

The Bank may also turn out to have more staying power than the World Trade Organization. The enforcement of global capitalist power by the WTO with its TRIPS and TRIMS agreements, has been inequitable, and is well known. These are the agreements that are *not vague*, and are open to judgment on a case-by-case basis by the Dispute Settlement Mechanism which consists of committees of unaccountable ‘experts’. They are unaccountable but have the power to constrain the role of democratically elected national bodies. However, the defeat of the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and then the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and now resistance to Western demands in the WTO’s Doha Round, whatever the outcome, will mean that trade is increasingly dominated by bilateral deals in which the ‘investor is king’ as envisaged by the MAI. The WTO has caused great damage, but at the same time, however distorted they are, it has aimed to create a system of economic governance based on a universal set of rules, and in the process made the case for collective action obvious and compelling. This possibility makes bilateral trade and investment deals far more attractive to the powerful. Since 2004, and despite rejection of the FTAA, the USA has bilateral deals with Chile, Peru, Colombia, Central America, and has ongoing talks with Panama.

Fingers in all the Pies

The global reach of the World Bank, however, is far more secure. Its role in structural adjustment has been far more hands-on than that of the IMF. In 1990 the Bank’s Infrastructure Economics and Finance department formed a proxy set-up, the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility. Its default ideology is free market capitalism, in place ever since the Elliot Berg report of 1982. From 2004 it has relaxed its environmental and social requirements when lending to the private sector, especially as it lends most to the mining, oil and gas industries, with flexibility a justification in itself. As opposed to the IMF, it has applied this ideology by itself, or via proxies, at a *micro* level. In our marketing dominated times this has been done under the buzz words ‘participation’ (also an NGO word along with ‘empowerment,’ equity’, and ‘sustainability’) and ‘poverty eradication’. In practice ‘participation’ has had two functions. It depicts relations between creditors and debtors, governments and NGOs as if their interests were identical or at least compatible; and it has replaced democratic decision-making. This has amounted to the participation of senior officials of the affected countries being given expanded opportunities to participate in new layers of managerial activity. These include becoming consultants, international institution staff, or managers of ‘participatory’ processes funded



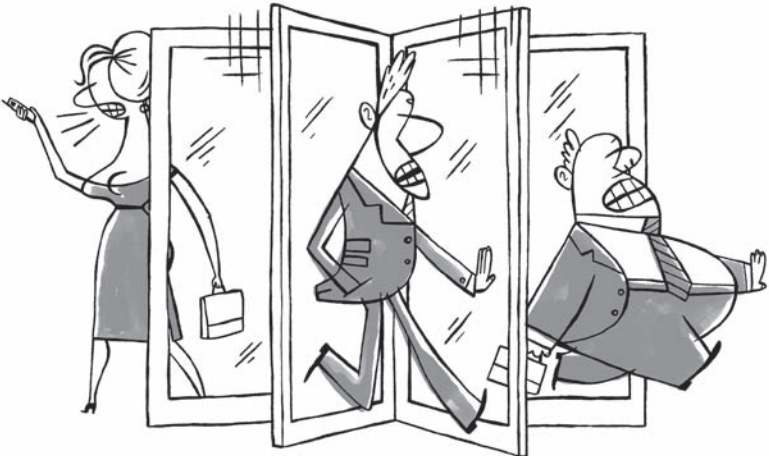
by the Bank (see Civicus above) or by bilateral donors. This co-option of official local elites weakens local democracy, and has also given the Bank access to a wealth of knowledge(s) of specific situations. It is knowledge from the partial view point of careerists, whether ‘expert’ or with political/bureaucratic experience. It is this monopolisation of knowledge – as for example its Private Participation in Infrastructure Project Database, which it contributed to the Advisory Facility mentioned above – which puts the Bank at



the centre of a series of elite, ad hoc ‘institutions’ with power.

J.F. Rischard, the Bank’s long term vice-president for Europe (with a background in academia and Wall Street) has been involved in various such elite networks, not just Davos but a series of more shadowy outfits:¹⁵

- The Rockefeller Brothers Fund Project on World Security (“Transnational governance requires the establishment of relationships, understandings, and shared expectations that are both self-



- regulating and self-sustaining”).
- The Commission on Globalization (“A leadership network for constructive global change”).
- The Global Information Infrastructure Commission (“fosters private sector leadership and public-private sector cooperation in the developement of information networks and services to advance global economic growth, education and quality of life”).
- The Governing Body of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University. A position that seems especially sinister in the context of that monopolisation of information.
- The World Business Council for Sustainable

Development, and international group of Corporate CEOs) (“the pursuit of sustainable development is good for business and business is good for sustainable development”).

This latter outfit has been especially powerful in parameter-setting and negotiations on the issue of stabilising greenhouse gas emissions, an area in which strategic vagueness has been especially prevalent. It’s well known that from the Rio Conference of 1992 onwards – despite its Framework Convention on Climate Change – the absence of legally binding emissions targets was consistent US policy.¹⁶ The Doha Declaration has adopted vague and contradictory language when it comes to specific reduction mechanisms. The World Business Council’s role has been more in its influence over UNCED, and in developing the murky world of emissions trading. Such ad hoc power is equally prevalent in this sphere, where “actions and tasks for the global governance of environmental issues are currently scattered in different institutions, as is also the case in the health sector. The Kyoto Protocol itself, which the USA would not sign, has targets but the trading allowed by it in the form of Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs) shares all the characteristics of ‘nothing definite’. “The CDM community of financial advisers, accountants and consultants is a very tight network with ties to investment bankers, which raises doubt about independent verification.”¹⁷ Doubts which are the greater because supposed defence against the abuse of CDMs, the concept of ‘additionality’, is itself vaguely defined.

Across the Board

The processes described apply to every aspect of life-impacting decisions and policy:

- International water bodies have become more insistent on private sector involvement, a line being pushed by the World Commission on Water for the Twenty First Century which calls openly for governments to step aside, and for full-cost pricing. It has been chaired by Ismail Seragledin, a World Bank vice president.
- Food aid is increasingly channeled bilaterally rather than through the co-ordinated and multilateral system of the World Food programme.
- The spread of ad hoc ‘security’ organisations is not just a US phenomena. Ever since 1991 Tony Bunyan and *Statewatch* have described the plethora of such organisations within the European Union, including the Trevi group set up in 1976 of which he comments, “the British government sees Trevi’s ‘distinctive strength’ as lying in the informal, spontaneous and political character of its discussions.”
- For the nuts and bolts structure of the internet it is root servers and their location that has become most contentious – Africa does not have a single one – but ICANN (The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) has acted as a classic ad hoc set-up, or as an “adhocracy” as Michael Froomkin, Professor of Law at University of Miami School of Law, described it.

Misplaced Responsibility

The formal structure of organisations is no guarantee of how democratic they are in any real sense [by which I mean they are quite liable to be manipulated by promises, threats and demands for loyalty.. The development of wireless local area networks, open source software and a whole DIY culture it has been such an important part of, could only have happened in ad hoc style. Equally for the emerging, ‘consciousness-raising’ Women’s Movement of the late 1960s it was informal organisation that was appropriate. The warning from ‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’ was that it would not be appropriate for activist, decision-making women’s groups for whom it was not just a matter of providing the tools for people at large. Powerful ad hoc agencies of capital’s protectorate have no critical voice to make a similar warning. Or rather, they would not understand such a voice, or want to understand it. Instead they are one significant component in the final draining

the ‘democratic’ from democracy, of *effective* accountability to citizens.

The limits to the democratic nature of professionalised representative democracy are well known, as against a structure of recallable delegates. It is the development of such delegate structures which are essential for a non-euphemistic way of seeing *whose* benefit and *whose* risk is being taken in any given policy. This is real ‘participatory democracy’ rather than the World Bank/NGO scam version. Where it does exist it tends to be at local level, but the limits of representative democracy have an impact on them with their power to create the parameters of what is possible, though these can be broken. The institutions of this professionalised democracy can either allow some space for social movements or take it away, or at the very least make strenuous efforts to do so. As these institutions become increasingly ad hoc, the space shrinks.

We know things are bad when the elite – necessarily exclusive – think tank-cum-seminar organiser and ‘opinion former’, the Ditchley Foundation, can hold a conference entitled ‘Legitimacy/Correcting the Democratic Deficit’. The lack of self-awareness is staggering; the words “part of the problem” come to mind. What *they* have in mind is clearly nothing to do with a citizen’s democracy. We know how bad things have become when the ‘War on Terror’ has created the precedent of an international ‘community’ – with a selective and flexible composition – which is not bound by formal decision-making or indeed the nominal limitations of international law. This is then amplified by how such ad hoc power becomes institutionalised by the power of precedent, like ‘coalitions of the willing’, the World Economic Forums, or the G7/8 itself.

All this, it could be said, is nothing new; except that the process has gone further than ever, and it also coincides with a crisis of capital’s self-driven deregulation, and of its protectorate’s complicity and failure in the economic sphere, the sphere in which it is supposed to be expert and on which its reputation is so dependent. The crisis provides the proverbial ‘window of opportunity’ to contest diffuse and comprehensive unaccountability in all spheres, and the protectorate’s ideological grip. Indeed it’s a necessity when, despite the havoc caused by neoliberalism economically, its ideology pedals on like one of those cartoon characters over the edge of the cliff, airborne until it looks down, which, so far, it has not had to do. The protectorate’s predominant rhetoric is still that of citizens’ rights being conditional on responsibilities as defined by the protectorate. It has talked cynically of “dependency being bred in individuals” as justification. This when it itself is irresponsible and so unaccountable. New Labour implies that citizenship is only the right of those who “play by the rules”, when in fact the rules they play by are flexible, vague and ad hoc.¹⁸ Peter Harries-Jones, talking of how “social, political and economic risk increasingly escapes the institutional monitoring of risk” – now so obvious in the case of the economic – goes on to say, “but such blindness is no mere happenstance. The loose coalition of business firms, policymakers and experts who comment and/or devise policies about risk in contemporary society have constructed a discourse of euphemisms as a means of disavowing their responsibilities.” The very nature of such ‘loose coalitions’ makes this possible.

One opening in this window of opportunity is to make something of the demands being made from what was once called *social democracy* for regulation in the financial sphere, into a scrutiny of just how little good governance there is at all levels. I have written elsewhere of how regulatory demands following the East Asian currency crisis of 1997-8 – demands from some serious globalized capitalists for a ‘global financial architecture’ – came to nothing.¹⁹ There is a fear in the heart of capital’s slippery protectorate of getting into negotiating situations of any sort, despite their experience in smothering outcomes. The present situation is so serious however that it may be unavoidable, and any substantive negotiation

has the possibility of being turned into that can of worms they fear. The pressure to make this happen will come mostly from the ‘less developed world’. Latin America’s forms of real participatory democracy *and* its mutually empowering diplomacy in resisting the FTAA is one model, one which demanded the FTAA negotiations be as transparent as possible with clear procedures for the dissemination of information to the affected populations. Our job in the West, at a minimum, with a becoming modesty vis-à-vis the rest of the world, is to pin down responsibility, expand its scope, and block off protectorate evasion.

Notes

1. After the massacre at Mutla Ridge at the beginning of 1991, a Pentagon spokesman was explicit about wanting to keep the numbers vague, as reported by *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2nd March 1991. This time around the estimate given by *The Lancet* of civilian deaths has been routinely attacked, but not countered by any estimates from the invaders.
2. David Runciman: ‘Institutional Hypocrisy’: *London Review of Books*, 21st April 2005
3. Barker: *Variant*, Issue 30, Winter 2007
4. Critics like Alex de Waal are distinctly snooty when talking about emergency relief efforts. It seems especially perverse to in effect blame aid agencies for feeding Mozambicans during the Renamo destabilisation terror on the grounds that somehow this perpetuated a ‘civil war’. A fair and open-minded account can be found in Bruce Robbins’ ‘Progressive politics in transnational space’ in *Radical Philosophy* 153, Jan-Feb 2009. In the review he is critical of the tick-box ultra-leftism of Nicolas Guilhot’s ‘The Democracy Makers’ which second guesses in ideological fashion.
5. John Fante of the extremist Hudson Institute has demanded aid cut-offs for such sins.
6. See the aptly named ‘Civil Society or Shadow State’ by Margaret Sutton and Robert F. Arnove: Information Age Publishing 2005. Its focus is on education but gives a wider analysis.
7. ‘Africa’s Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging’: Francis B. Nyamnjoh: Zed Books
8. In the Tanzanian case BAe managed to sell them £28 millions worth of a pointless military air traffic control system.
9. It involved dusting down this dusty old theory which had sat on the shelves since the 1920s when Irving Fisher had set down in tablets of stone that $MV=PT$.
10. Describing the modern realities of export horticulture, Oxfam has described the loose contractual arrangements in many areas: “Agreements are often verbal, so that there is no written contract to break...Such informality gives buyers flexibility to delay payments, break programmes or cancel orders, forcing suppliers to find last-minute alternatives.”
11. Jeffrey Sachs: “IMF loans are effectively used to repay the foreign investors either through a fairly direct mechanism” or, in the case of Brazil, “when the central bank sells the dollars in the foreign exchange market as part of its currency operations.”
12. The Zionists are themselves experts at the use of ad hoc set-ups in the confiscation of Palestinian land as part of a mixed strategy of brute force and legalese. Confiscated land could not be sold but became a joint possession of the state and the entire Jewish people by allowing the Jewish National Fund, Jewish Agency and the Zionist Federation a share of the state’s sovereign powers. “The transfer of land to the hands of unaccountable bodies can be likened to a black hole from which Arab land cannot be retrieved.” As Masalha puts it in “The Nabka”.
13. See A.Damon ‘The Gates Foundation and the rise of free market philanthropy’: World Prout Assembly: 2007
14. *The Observer*, 10th August 2008
15. See Jonathan Murphy: ‘The Rise of Global Managers’; in Dar and Cooke, ‘The New Development Management’, Zed Books
16. In the case of the agreement on forest protection, the resulting document ‘Non Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles’ – the very title a giveaway – is filled with green promises but continued to push for free market access for timber interests.
17. Y. Schreuder: ‘The Corporate Greenhouse’, Zed Books
18. It hardly needs saying that the UK Parliament is useless as a defender of the citizen. Only the jury system provides defence of the citizen by the citizen and that is why New Labour is forever chipping away at it.
19. See Barker: ‘Wishful Thinkers at the Calamity Bazaar’; *Mute*, December 2008

Glasgow's *Merchant City*: An Artist Led Property Strategy

Neil Gray

"Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development towards absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space *into its own peculiar décor*."

Guy Debord¹

In Ian Sinclair's 'Downriver', early indications of the gentrification of London's Docklands arrived with the wave of bohemians, squatters, and artists who descended on the area to take advantage of the spacious, dilapidated buildings and cheap rents: "When artists walk through a wilderness in epiphanous 'bliss-out', fiddling with polaroids, grim estate agents dog their footsteps. And when the first gay squatters arrive, bearing futons...the agents smile, and reach for their cheque books. The visionary reclaims the ground of his nightmares only to present it, framed in Perspex, to the Docklands Development Board"². Last year, from the window of my flat in the Gallowgate (Glasgow's near east end), I looked on as a group of artists moved into a disused, shuttered shop to set up a temporary gallery for the duration of the Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Visual Art (Gi). When I asked one of the artists how they had 'found' the space, she replied that a representative from Glasgow City Council had led the artists on a tour of disused shops in the 'edge of success' area around Trongate and the Gallowgate offering free leases for the duration of the festival. The Gi brochure alluded to this process – as well as borrowing carelessly from urban frontier language³ – by suggesting gallery visitors embark on a 'cultural safari' in both celebrated arts venues, and, "in 'found' or temporary locations throughout the city". From a situation where artists and squatters had once *led* gentrification, albeit unconsciously, an instrumental policy framework is now firmly in place whereby city officials do the

leading as they seek to enhance property values through the cultural capital of artists and the creation of a 'creative cluster' in the area now re-branded as the 'Merchant City'.

As Neil Smith, and many other critical urban theorists, have noted, the ad-hoc, almost accidental nature of gentrification that Ruth Glass had in mind when she first coined the term in 1964⁴ has now been replaced by gentrification as a global urban phenomenon; a (once) *productive* pillar of investment capitalism, that weaves together global financial markets with a phalanx of real-estate developers, local merchants, property agents and brand name retailers – all lubricated by generous state subsidy⁵. As Sinclair has observed, the potential of 'the arts' to rehabilitate 'unproductive' urban space, and stimulate the property market has long been established by gimlet-eyed developers. In this context it should come as no surprise that Gi are preparing for re-location to 'Trongate 103' – a much-vaunted proposed 'hub' for the diverse arts community in the Merchant City area – alongside a host of other arts organisations in the area. Trongate 103 (which names itself to let us know it is a *place*) is a symbolic marker of city boosters' attempts to foster a 'cultural quarter' in the Merchant City; a city centre area which has seen significant gentrification and displacement since the '60s, when clothing manufacture, warehousing and the regional fruit market were the main activities. Despite the failed promises of cultural quarters in London⁶, Dublin⁷ and Liverpool⁸, the area has now been designated as the prime site to 'pump-prime' Glasgow's creative industries⁹ and bolster the city's 'Glasgow: Scotland With Style' marketing strategy. The policy of subsidising arts space must be seen in the context of an overall strategy by the City Council to revalorise property values and land rents in the Merchant City area through the City Council's unambiguous 'Artist Led Property Strategy'¹⁰.

'The Merchant City Five Year Action Plan 2007-12', the strategic document for the development of the Merchant City area, inevitably pays homage to Richard Florida and his ubiquitous, but increasingly shopworn 'creative city' thesis¹¹. Florida, a self-confessed product of the '60s, who always liked to consider himself "a bit edgy or cool"¹², is responsible for much of the hyperbole surrounding the potential of the 'creative industries' to 'regenerate' the post-industrial city. Florida's thesis, outlined in detail later in this article, is that regional economic growth is powered by creative people. These creative people prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. *Place* in this matrix is thus the 'central organising unit' of the economy, the key lever in attracting talented and creative people to a city region. The task of the city region is then to increase its place-attractiveness (understood through such measures as 'gay' and 'bohemian' indexes) so that it can compete for the services of the 'creative classes', who will then generate *economic value* through their creativity, thus ensuring the city will achieve 'winner' status in something called the 'creative economy'.

As urban geographer Jamie Peck has noted, the Florida thesis, despite its 'sophomore sociology' has provoked a reaction that has bordered on the ecstatic in urban policymaking communities around the world¹³. It is hardly revelatory that Glasgow's city development agencies reference what Peck calls Florida's "creativity fix"; Florida's thesis, as Peck notes, has been artfully crafted for the contemporary political-economic landscape: "In this neo-liberalised urban terrain, a receptive and wide audience has effectively been pre-

constituted for the kinds of market-reinforcing, property- and promotion-based, growth-oriented, and gentrification-friendly policies that have been repackaged under the creativity rubric"¹⁴. Despite increasing skepticism around the hyperbolic claims of Florida, the creative city policy framework is still being applied by countless slow-learning global cities worldwide. Florida himself acknowledges the 'creative classes' as the vanguard of gentrification, displacement and inequality – depending as they do on an "extensive venture capital system" on the one hand, and on the other, an increasingly impoverished and insecure service class as their "supporting infrastructure"¹⁵, yet Glasgow City Council seem oblivious, or unconcerned. However, rather than have us submit to boosterist overstatement, Peck usefully contextualises the competitive creative economy mantra as the afterbirth of a wave of self-defeating entrepreneurial urban strategies which preceded it.

The Production Of 'Place': An Economy Of Appearances.

Peck's materially-grounded critical analysis emerges from theoretical foundations laid down by David Harvey, particularly his seminal analysis of the paradigmatic shift from a *managerial* mode of urban government – nominally associated with 'thick' government, redistribution, and the provision of services and amenities to local citizens – to an *entrepreneurial* market-led mode of governance, firmly pre-occupied with facilitating economic growth for capital¹⁶. The broad context for this shift is the transition from 'Fordist-Keynesian' modes of accumulation to new rounds of what Harvey characterised as 'flexible accumulation' – a 'spatial fix', engineered in response to the early '70s crisis of over-accumulation, characterised by de-industrialisation, de-unionsiation, accelerated international capital flows (globalisation), privatisation, and the exploitation of an increasingly 'flexible' and geographically diverse labour market. In this formation, space is annihilated by time, and economies of *scope* vanquish economies of *scale*. As neo-liberal modes of flexible accumulation have gained hegemonic status over the collective bargaining powers of nation-states, so the matter of inward investment has increasingly taken the form of negotiations between international finance capital and local *city* powers. Lacking the power derived from large-scale, planned state investment in regional economies, inter-city competition for global investment capital has intensified in parallel. As a consequence of this, city governments are increasingly obliged to take an entrepreneurial turn, and act as *active state partners* in an attempt to lubricate capitalist investment in the city.

In a fiercely competitive inter-urban environment, rather than service the needs of its citizens on a universal basis, the key issue for the entrepreneurial city is the provision of "a good business climate"¹⁷. In order to obtain this business-friendly regime, cities are forced into a highly competitive "race to the bottom"; a "zero-sum" game routing scarce public resources (land and assets), and driving down labour conditions, so that increasingly benevolent measures can be offered to entice investment capital. Unsurprisingly, these booster activities only accentuate and diversify the geographical mobility and flexibility of capital, forcing urban governments to produce ever more competitive policy cocktails, and subsuming policy ever





more within the groove of uneven capitalist development: “Indeed, to the degree that inter-urban competition becomes more potent, it will almost certainly operate as an external coercive power over individual cities to bring them closer into line with the discipline and logic of capitalist development”¹⁸. Ultimately, the end game is capitulation to market forces: under the “external coercive power” of neo-liberalism, even the most resolute of city governments, “find themselves, in the end, playing the capitalist game and performing as agents of discipline for the very processes they are trying to resist”¹⁹.

The discriminatory deployment by the nation-state of nominally Keynesian measures, has led the entrepreneurial city to concentrate on the political economy of *place* rather than *territory*. By territory, Harvey means the type of economic and infrastructural projects (housing, education, etc.) designed to improve the universal conditions of living and working in a particular jurisdiction. The construction of place, however (shopping malls, sports stadia, conference centres, iconic buildings, ‘cultural quarters’, etc.) is cultivated through public-private partnership, and designed, in large part, to enhance and upgrade the *image* of the city – primarily for the investor and the tourist. In this model, city branding, place marketing, and the production of urban spectacle take precedence over the amelioration of general, structural conditions in the wider terrain. Despite thoroughly discredited promises of Thatcherite ‘trickle-down’, urban spectacle and an uneven and limited focus on place, typically functions to divert attention from broader problems in the overall economy and to mask the brutal demarcations between winners and losers, and the included and excluded in the neo-liberal city. As Peck argues, it is precisely in this unequal policy nexus that Florida’s feel-good ‘creativity fix’ has found a willing audience amongst urban policy makers.

Moving Up The Value Chain? The Art Of Gentrification

A “key policy message” from the Glasgow Economic Forum (a partnership body between Scottish Enterprise Glasgow and Glasgow City Council responsible for overseeing economic regeneration and development in the city) is that cities and city regions are *the* key drivers of economic growth, and that investment must be located in priority locations and industries within the metropolitan core. Glossing over the debilitating national and regional context outlined in Harvey’s thesis, and neglecting to offer any real challenge to the hegemony of neoliberalism, the Forum instead, in typical booster form, talks up the “positive policy environment” for entrepreneurial cities²⁰. With an emphasis on place-specific, inevitably competitive inter-urban policy, a stated ambition of the Forum is to attract tourist revenue and to attain ‘Top UK destination status’. In a typical formulation from the Florida-inspired creative city handbook, the Forum aspires to “develop, retain and attract people and talent” by “building on Glasgow’s distinctive diversity and city ‘buzz’, increasing its place attractiveness, and

developing the city’s cultural and leisure offer”²¹. Thus, one of the key themes in the Forum’s ‘A Step Change For Glasgow: Action Plan To 2013’ is to develop the city center as a retail and cultural environment. A key component of this plan is to develop the Merchant City as a ‘cultural quarter’ through the ‘Merchant City Action Plan 2007-2012’ and an ‘Arts Property Strategy’²².

The Merchant City Initiative (whose key partners are *also* Scottish Enterprise Glasgow and Glasgow City Council) is the agency charged with delivering the Merchant City Five Year Action Plan and overseeing the distribution of a programme of grants to renovate the built environment in the area through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) – funded by Glasgow City Council, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, and the Heritage Lottery Fund (£3 million of subsidy grants have been targeted at owners of historic buildings within the Merchant City). The plan’s manifesto is a Floridian utopia: “To create an area of design and inspirational excellence, individuality and style – a unique urban quarter where the cultural and artistic can mix with retail and residential to generate energy, where quality architecture re-enforces the sense of place and creates activity and where boldness and innovation is positively encouraged at the expense of mediocrity”²³. Ten million pounds of ‘public realm’ beautification works have already been committed by Glasgow City Council to help encourage this project, with a list of sixty-five physical developments either committed, proposed or in discussion at 2006²⁴. The ultimate aim is to make the Merchant City (through strategic marketing and pump-priming investment strategies), “Glasgow’s foremost mixed-use, creative, cultural, business and residential quarter”²⁵. The mantra is ‘Glasgow: Scotland with Style’...*ad infinitum*.

Central to plans for lifting the Merchant City and Glasgow “indisputably into a UK league of creative cities”²⁶, is the creation of a ‘creative cluster’ around the Trongate area: “The economic and social impact of the presence of the arts community and the cluster effect of a successful ‘arts quarter’ is one of the central tenets of the Council’s recent Five Year Action Plan for the regeneration of the Merchant City, Trongate and Glasgow Cross area”²⁷. By “harnessing” Glasgow’s creative and cultural energy, the initiative aims to position the area as the ‘natural’ home for these “new explorative and innovative developments in technology and attitude”²⁸. Key to these plans are the proposed creation of a “business centre for cultural and creative industries” at the City Council’s cleansing Depot on Bell Street, or in King Street (South Block); the establishment of an artists studio/gallery ‘hub’ at ‘Trongate 103’ in King Street (North Block); and the renovation of the Briggait building as the new home for the Glasgow Sculpture Studios and Workers And Artists Studio Provision Scotland (WASPS). These developments are designed to consolidate the ‘arts quarter’, alongside current institutions such as The Tron Theatre, The Ramshorn Theatre, St.Andrews In The Square and The Gallery Of Modern Art (GoMA), and proposed developments such as the Bathhouse project. The £8.5 million Trongate

103, perhaps the centrepiece of the strategy, will ‘consolidate’ several arts organisations currently housed in City Council property nearby, including Glasgow Independent Studio, Glasgow Print Studio, Glasgow Media Access centre (GMAC), Sharmanka, Project Ability, Street Level Photoworks, Transmission Gallery, and the Russian Cultural Center. Gi will take up residence in June this year.

The long-term rationale for the ‘Artist Led Property Strategy’ is made perfectly clear in the City Council’s ‘Housing the Visual Arts in Glasgow’s Merchant City’ strategy report. By consolidating arts organisations in single premises, the City Council hopes to capitalise on the assumed ability of the arts to thrive in “edge of success” urban areas like the Trongate and Glasgow Cross. The arts are seen as a potentially “major regenerative tool” for the raising of general perceptions and confidence in the area’s future potential. Whose confidence needs to be raised, and what kind of ‘future potential’ is envisioned, are of course key questions – the consolidation of a “strategic partnership for the arts” is considered central to the raising of “external investment confidence” for the proposed development of the adjacent St.Enoch East car park site into a cinema complex, incorporating car parking, by Stannifer Developments.²⁹ Meanwhile, the pursuit of an arts strategy that consolidates different organisations chimes with the increasingly *instrumental* face of National Lottery funding. The Lottery has intimated that it will not entertain large capital funding for Glasgow-based arts organisations unless the city produces a strategic plan for housing the visual arts³⁰.

Further, in light of the austere and worsening fiscal climate, and the collapse of commercial property markets in particular, and in line with Glasgow City Council’s policy to generate revenue from the sale of publicly held land and assets, the Council and the Merchant City Initiative intend to promote the area’s ‘renewal’ through the refurbishment and pro-active marketing of a number of City Council properties in the Merchant City. Stephen Purcell, leader of the City Council, recently clarified the City’s position when he made clear at the State of the City economy conference that ‘Team Glasgow’ was still very much open for business: “The first thing that all public bodies, including my own Council, must do, is to examine where we can help business by being more flexible and willing to do things differently. This is no time for unnecessary rules and processes; this is a time to do everything we can to help”³¹. As part of this ‘flexible’ approach, Purcell ensured the business community that it can expect more “slack” from the Council in terms of ‘land disposal’ and leasing of Council property. Thus, the Merchant City Initiative website (in its ‘Trade into Trongate’ section) assures readers and investors that these “freshly shelled out retail spaces” will have very “flexible” and “attractive” lease terms³². A large percentage of the arts organisations included in the creative cluster rubric are currently housed in separate council-owned buildings, which are leased at what were considered “below market values”; by pulling these groups together, the City Council

intend to capitalize on the vacant properties, or, as they put it, to “rationalise property aspirations with available space”. Agglomerating these varied arts and cultural groups into one space will also assist the “freeing up of other surplus property for re-use and potential conversion/sale, thus increasing Capital receipts to the Council and removing property from its portfolio which has *ceased to perform in an economic manner*”³³ [my emphasis].

The transition from use value, which may not perform ‘in an economic manner’, to exchange value, which by definition must add economic ‘value’, is of course a central imperative of growth-orientated capitalism – an imperative, which by its very nature leads to monopoly. While the Housing The Visual Arts Strategy, talks up the benefits of a sustainable, secure, ‘arts quarter’, the effects of the ‘arts led property strategy’ are manifested throughout the Merchant City. A look through Glasgow City Council’s inventory of physical developments in the Merchant City area, dated 2006, shows an overwhelming preponderance of high-grade *private* residential, retail and office developments³⁴. Despite oft-cited Floridian claims for plurality and diversity in the residential make up of ‘creative cities’, the Merchant City, is already geared towards the retail and housing consumption demands of middle-class taste – this strategy is likely to be intensified rather than mitigated in the coming years. Out of sixty-five proposed or confirmed developments, only two proposals involve social housing organisations (both of them in Duke Street it should be noted, far away from the ‘arts quarter’ epicentre). Meanwhile, arts organisations and the ‘cultural quarter’, concentrated in the newly branded ‘lower east side’ of the Merchant City, despite the hyperbole, play a very small, increasingly agglomerated, and place-specific part in the development of the Merchant City overall. Indeed, only five of the new developments could be said to involve arts or cultural organisations, and two of these developments are dedicated to rationalising a diverse mix of existing cultural organisations into single premises.

The Art Of Rent: The Manhattan Model

“Certainly artists are only the forerunners of high-income, youngish, non-minority residents. But after the artists, a rising tide of high-rents and condominium conversions seems unstoppable.”

Sharon Zukin, 1982³⁵

Artists have been used for some time now as ‘urban pioneers’ for canny developers in the property market. David Panos of ‘The London Particular’ (an artists group charting the gentrification of Shoreditch and the east end of London through film-making and urban theory) has observed how the London Development Agency (LDA) in its ‘Creative London’ programme had formalised, through ‘The Creative Space Agency’³⁶, what had often been an ad-hoc relationship between artists and developers, whereby space was leased to artists at rent-free or peppercorn rents for prescribed periods. The Creative Space Agency now acts as a *pro-active* broker between artists and landlords whose property lies empty. As Panos acknowledges, this strategy is always likely to appeal to artists in search of cheap and spacious premises. But for the developers and city agencies the agenda is quite different. Attracting seemingly upwardly mobile artists to ‘edge of success’ urban areas simultaneously helps rehabilitate and increase the property values of ‘uneconomic’ premises and changes the perception of ‘run down’ areas. Meanwhile, as Panos notes, government intervention aids a ‘soft’ policing and regulation of space, discouraging squatters (in the London context) and vandalism, as the artists, in effect, act as “free security guards” for the properties. Moreover, with increasing state intervention, arts projects can be “vetted, behaviour regulated, and the process brought under centralised control”³⁷. For Panos, The Creative Space Agency makes clear



the exceptional, *instrumental* role of art in the gentrification-led economy. But if the celebrated example of Shoreditch is anything to go by, the fostering of a ‘creative hub’ in the Merchant City will only have a negative effect on local, working-class residents. The net effect of Shoreditch’s transformation into a cultural hub, according to Panos, “has been to escalate property prices out of the reach of all but a privileged minority, and drive up the overall cost of living”³⁸.

The Shoreditch example, has an exemplary precursor in the artist led gentrification of Lower east Manhattan. Sharon Zukin’s ‘Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change’ (1988), captured how New York City became “both the harbinger and the model of loft living”³⁹. By charting the conversion of industrial and light industrial manufacturing units to spacious ‘loft-living’ style residential apartments, the book proved seminal in marking the transition from a manufacturing to a ‘post-industrial’ service economy in Manhattan. For artists in the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, Manhattan lofts were often merely a question of marginal utility: cheap rooms and plenty of space. Yet these lofts, and the arts production that took place within them, played a crucial role, both symbolically and materially, in an embryonic arts led property market. Zukin argued, convincingly as it turned out, that the concern for loft style apartments as objects of consumption reflected changes in patterns of consumption in the ‘60s: a more active appreciation of the arts; and a nostalgia for the aesthetic of the industrial machine age. As Manhattan-based artists such as Robert Rauschenberg began to hit it big their celebrity increasingly attracted the attention of the mainstream – as did the way they lived. On the one hand, artist’s lofts were vicariously identified with a sense of adventure or bohemian ambience. On the other hand, the massive ‘raw’ spaces of the industrial lofts began to exert a powerful aesthetic appeal. By choosing a return to an industrial aesthetic, the return to the city was a return to the industrial past, but this time a more *manageable* past. Lofts thus became both the site and symbol of the transition to a service sector economy, concretising the process of de-industrialisation: “Lofts that are converted to residential use can no longer be used as machine-shops, printing plants, dress factories, or die-cutting operations. The residential conversion of manufacturing lofts confirms and symbolises the death of the urban manufacturing centre”⁴⁰.

In Manhattan, the arts’ presence was crucial in helping to destabilise existing uses and redefine the terrain for new markets of middle-class consumption – “as patrons, public, and, ultimately tenants”⁴¹. As the art market developed around the bohemian atmosphere of the lofts, and art institutions sprang up to support the market (making art both a career and an investment opportunity) an appreciation of ‘the arts’, and historic preservation, went hand in hand to

preserve loft apartments and the artists within them. State subsidies for artists in New York during the ‘60s and ‘70s allowed artists to become major producers in the emerging arts economy. But by attracting a new vanguard of middle-class art consumers, and those ‘enchanted’ by the raw (but now domesticated) spaces of the industrial past, arts producers unwittingly enhanced property values to such an extent that those people who tried to live off artwork or performance were effectively priced out of the market through gentrification. The succession of uses and users over time is directly analogous with typical processes of gentrification: “A market of small manufacturers slowly yields to demand for space by artists and artisans and middle- to upper middle-class residents. The sequence of users converts loft space to increasingly ‘better’ use and, in so doing, alters the quintessential form in which that space is used”⁴².

The concentration of artists and a bohemian ‘artistic community’ offered middle- and upper-middle class consumers ready made ‘cultural capital’, and made it possible for developers to charge escalating rates for housing in ‘edgy’ areas like SoHo. Up until this point, artists, benefiting from subsidy, had little reason to interfere in market forces, but sooner or later, as Zukin has pointed out, a contradiction arises between the production of art, and developing higher-rent uses: “At this point real estate development reasserts its dominance over the arts economy”⁴³. After the arts’ presence revalorised property prices in areas of the city like SoHo to the extent that artists could no longer afford to live there, they simply moved on to another ‘run-down’ area to establish the same process of gentrification and displacement elsewhere. Subsidy for the arts in NY, as Zukin pointed out, soon became, by proxy, a subsidy for the property market: “Regarded in the short run as a bonanza for creative and performing artists, production subsidies for arts infrastructure proved, in the long run, to be a cornucopia for housing developers”⁴⁴.

Gentrification may appear – and be represented as – a visible sign of economic growth by local state officials, tourists, and business elites, but, as Zukin argued, what is really at stake is “...the reconquest of the downtown for high-class users and high-rent uses”⁴⁵. Manhattan was not only the harbinger of ‘loft living’ and industrial conversion, it was also a seminal precursor of artist-led gentrification – now writ large as global urban strategy. By the 1990s, according to Zukin, no matter how restricted the definition of art that was implied, or how few artists were included, or how little the benefits extended to all social groups, “making a place for art in the city”, went along with establishing a “marketable identity” for the city as a whole⁴⁶.

The Creative Classes, Or, Middle Class Masquerade?

“In essence, Florida’s advice is what savvy consultants might tell a brand trying to boost market share: Attract lots of young people, project an image of authenticity, and generate buzz. It works for TV networks, soft drinks and cars. Why not cities?”

Adweek⁴⁷

Richard Florida argues that place is now the “central organising unit” of the so-called creative economy. In contrast, to those who argue that people travel and migrate in search of jobs, not places, Florida argues that the gathering of people, companies and resources into particular places with particular qualities generates economic growth: “Places provide the ‘thick’ and fluid labor markets that help match people to jobs. Places support the ‘mating markets’ that enable people to find life partners. Places provide the ecosystems that harness human creativity and turn it into economic value”⁴⁸. Believing that the somewhat nebulously defined ‘creative classes’ are the prime movers in this new economy, Florida’s theory decrees that regional economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people – the holders of creative capital – who prefer places that reflect their own supposedly open, diverse and

pluralistic values. Members of the creative class, come in all shapes, sizes, colours and lifestyles. Therefore, to be truly successful, cities and regions, if they are to obtain a significant ‘edge’ in the new economy, *must* create and foster places which will attract their diverse and divergent lifestyle needs. This, after all, is a class whose economic function, Florida breathlessly declares, makes them “the natural – indeed the only possible – leaders of twenty-first-century society”⁴⁹.

Florida’s ‘big story’ is that the creative class is “the great emerging class of our time”⁵⁰. Broadly agreeing with Peter Drucker’s ‘knowledge economy’ thesis (which argues that *knowledge* is the basic human resource), Florida claims to make an advance on Drucker by arguing that *creativity* – and the creation of ‘useful’ new forms derived from knowledge – is the key driver of the economy. The philosophical background for Florida’s thesis emerges from a right-wing school of economic thought called ‘New Growth Theory’. The theory, as espoused by Paul Romer, whom Florida approvingly cites in ‘The Rise Of The Creative Classes’, assigns a central role to creativity or ‘idea generation’ as a means for creating economic surplus value: “We are not used to thinking of ideas as economic goods [...] but they are surely the most significant ones that we produce. The only way for us to produce more economic value – and thereby generate economic growth – is to find ever more valuable ways to make use of the objects available to us”⁵¹. Romer argues that ideas are especially “potent goods” because a good idea can be used over and over, and in fact grows in value the more it is used, offering increasing returns. Florida, being a good entrepreneurial type, accepts Romer’s instrumentalist, and thoroughly market-orientated conflation of ideas and economic growth, but gives it a feel-good *creativity* spin: the creative class, as defined by Florida, is made up of people who “add economic value through their creativity”⁵². With creativity now instrumentally wedded to productivity and growth, and with place as the ‘key organising unit’ of the economy, Florida argues, those cities and regions that attract and retain the creative class are most likely to be the ‘economic winners’ in a framework of inter-urban competition for talent and growth.

But was this ever true? And who are the creative classes, anyway? The creative class is made up of a ‘creative core’, according to Florida’s classification, which is comprised of scientists, engineers, university professors, poets, novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers and architects, as well as the ‘thought leadership’ of our society, including non-fiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts and other opinion-makers. The creative-core group is supported by a phalanx of ‘creative professionals’ who work in a diverse range of ‘knowledge intensive’ industries such as high-tech, financial services, the legal and health care professions, and business management. While Marx understood class in terms of conflicting class interests dominated by uneven power relations, Florida, a keen supporter of growth-based free market economics, is keen to stress that the creative classes will work *with* rather than against the prevailing economic system: “The Creative Class has made certain symbols of non-conformity acceptable – even conformist. It is in this sense that they represent not an alternative group but a new and increasingly norm-setting mainstream of society”⁵³. In this sense Florida argues capitalism has pulled off a major coup, ‘capturing’ people who would have been seen as “bizarre mavericks” operating on the fringes of bohemia, and “setting them at the very heart of the process of innovation and growth”⁵⁴.

Florida’s claim that the so-called creative class make up the ‘mainstream’ of society is deeply contentious. In Glasgow, for instance, around nine out of ten of the city’s jobs are in the service sector, which as the Glasgow City Council Plan (2008-2011) acknowledges, is characterised by a preponderance of lower paid and lower skilled services. Meanwhile, about a quarter of Glasgow’s working age population are on benefits and

outside the workforce altogether. There is no point in arguing either that Glasgow’s benefit claimants and low-paid service sector workers can be rescued by “the leaders of twenty-first-century society”; for beneath Florida’s hyperbole a disturbing acknowledgement is made: “There is a strong correlation between inequality and creativity: the more creative a region is, the more inequality you will find there”⁵⁵. As Florida admits, this inequality has “insidious dimensions”. The service economy ultimately operates as the “support infrastructure” of the creative age: “Members of the Creative Class, because they are well compensated and work long and unpredictable hours, require a growing pool of low end service workers *to take care of them and do their chores*”⁵⁶ [my italics]. Florida himself suggests that the growth of this burgeoning, increasingly precarious service class must be understood *alongside* the rise of the creative class. Moreover, another troubling element arises in Florida’s thesis. In his tabulation of the classes (which includes ‘the agricultural class’, ‘the service class’, ‘the working class’, ‘the creative class’, and a subset, ‘the super-creative core’) traditional class actors – the middle and upper classes – are entirely absent. Could it be that their new homes are in the upper echelons of the ‘creative class’ and the ‘super-creative core’?

Like the ideologues of New Labour, the creative classes are a class that believes in the ‘values’ of meritocracy: work hard, be rewarded; *Arbecht Macht Frei*. In interviews that Florida conducted with the ‘creative class’, he came across people, “who no longer defined themselves mainly by the amount of money they make or their position in a financially delineated order”; rather, they were “...valiantly trying to defy an economic class into which they were born”⁵⁷. This is particularly true of the young descendants of the truly wealthy, says Florida, “who frequently describe themselves as just ‘ordinary’ creative people...”⁵⁸. Like the Blairite myth of a classless society, however, disavowal stalks the narrative. As Terry Eagleton, paraphrasing Marx, has tellingly observed, the division of labour between mental and manual labour marks the first point of *ideology*: “Now thought can begin to fantasize that it is outside of material reality, just because there is a material sense in which it actually is”⁵⁹. Yet Florida himself, frequently acknowledges his own complicity – and the complicity of the creative classes as a whole – in uneven power relations: “I have, in short, just about all the servants of an English Lord except that they’re not mine, and they don’t live below stairs; they are part-time and distributed in the local area”. He admits that meritocracy has its ‘dark side’: “By papering over the cause of cultural and educational advantage, meritocracy may subtly perpetuate the very prejudices it claims

to renounce”⁶⁰. Moreover, he concedes that the influx of affluent creative class types into working class areas doesn’t necessarily create more opportunities for local residents: “Instead, all it usually does is raise their rents and perhaps create more low end service jobs for waiters, house-cleaners and the like”⁶¹. The creative class may *wish* for diversity in lifestyle choices and social classes, but as Florida admits: “to some degree it is a diversity of elites, limited to highly educated, creative people”⁶². Florida, in fact, always seems to be falling behind the ramifications of his own theory – that any growth in the ‘creative class’ is far outstripped by the concomitant growth of an increasingly insecure service class.

Governing Through Crime: Managing ‘The Dark Side’

“The city-as-landscape does not encourage the formation of community or of urbanism as a way of life; rather it encourages the maintenance of surfaces, the promotion of order at the expense of lived social relations, and the ability to look past distress, destruction, and marginalisation to see only the good life (for some) and to turn a blind eye towards what that life is constructed out of”.

D Mitchell⁶³

Florida states the obvious when he acknowledges a ‘dark side’ to the ‘meritocracy’ script of the creative class. The cultures of cities, as Zukin points out, are always framed within a symbolic language of exclusion and entitlement: “The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not, on the concepts of order and disorder, and on the use of aesthetic power. In this primal sense, the city has always had a symbolic economy.”⁶⁴. Despite Florida-style references to “Glasgow’s distinctive diversity and city ‘buzz’”, the Merchant City is a characteristically punitive, selective and heavily policed neo-liberal urban terrain. As urban theorist Mike Davis commented in the context of ‘fortress LA’, while architects and city planners may be oblivious to how the built environment contributes to segregation – designated pariah groups read the meaning immediately⁶⁵. The Merchant City, as part of the heavily surveilled city center, has accessed the full panoply of human, physical and technological methods to regulate behaviour on its streets. These measures include the City Centre Enhanced Policing plan, Strathclyde Police’s ‘Stop and Search’ policy which saw 129,563 searches last year. While figures for the Merchant City in particular are difficult to disaggregate from city center figures generally, I personally witnessed an excessive spate of stop and search incidents, targeting beggars and the homeless, in the ‘edge of success’ frontier area around Glasgow Cross and the Trongate last year. Meanwhile, nine CCTV cameras at a cost of £300,000 were recently installed in the Merchant City to add to over 300 security cameras Glasgow-wide (in an indication of the converging agendas of ‘public safety’ and the business community; the city’s CCTV system is jointly funded by Glasgow Community and Safety Services and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow – Scotland’s main economic, enterprise, innovation and investment agency⁶⁶).

The major crucible in the Merchant City for all these regulatory, policing mechanisms has been the raid on Paddy’s Market which lies in Shipbank Lane on the southern fringes of the Merchant City near the river Clyde. The market – whose name is derived from the high number of Irish traders, many of whom were migrants from the Irish famine – is the oldest in the city with origins dating back to the 1820s. The market has been in Shipbank lane since 1935, and has been popular for decades with Glaswegians in search of bargains. A petition set up to save the market gives a positive account of its place in local history: “Initially a second-hand clothes market for the city’s poor and dispossessed, its traders now sell a wider range of secondhand and new goods to a wider community. More importantly, it is a city landmark, a tourist attraction and, at heart, simply a place for locals to meet and work together”⁶⁷.



However, in August 2007, Councillor Gordon Matheson brought negative media attention to Paddy’s Market by describing it as “crime-ridden midden”, and arguing for the closure of the Glasgow institution: “The days when Paddy’s Market made a contribution to the city are over, it has changed, and in my opinion it should be closed down”⁶⁸.

No doubt Councillor Matheson (as chair of Merchant City Tourism and Marketing Co-op Ltd) was aware of what was coming. In November last year, the market was raided by over 100 police officers accompanied by a phalanx of trading, customs and rail officials – and the blaze of media flashlights. As part of the investigation – codenamed ‘Operation Bazaar’ – fake CDs and DVDs, as well as counterfeit cigarettes and toys, some of which were allegedly smuggled into the country, were confiscated by the police. The investigation also led to eight men being arrested on suspicion of dealing class ‘A’ drugs. Superintendent Tom Doran, said of the operation: “My priority is to make sure the people who live, work and visit this side of the city, can go about their everyday business without fear or intimidation”. Meanwhile, a Glasgow City Council Spokesman explained the rationale for the raid: “High levels of crime, anti-social behaviour have increasingly become a significant problem in Shipbank Lane. They have had a detrimental impact on residents and visitors and on the efforts to improve the Merchant City”⁶⁹ [sic].

On October 28th 2008, the decision to close down Paddy’s Market was called-in by the City Council. Permission was granted to proceed with discussions to re-develop the market for “a combination of uses and sub-leases to business and arts organisations”⁷⁰. The city council are in discussions with site-owners Network Rail to take over the lease. After the deal is complete, the council intend to create a ‘mini-Camden Market’ on the site. Councillor George Ryan, the City Council’s regeneration convener explained the plans last year: “We will be able to lift the whole area. What we want is to create a mini-Camden Market in Glasgow city centre. We see this as a tourist destination, an arts and crafts market and a cultural venue. Other cities in Europe would bite your hand off for this type of opportunity. It’s near the Clyde and all the regeneration in St Enoch and the Merchant City”. Councillor Ryan continued: “Glasgow has moved on and we will not be dragged down by a blight which detracts from our efforts to regenerate the city. We present ourselves quite rightly as a vibrant and cultural city, which is a good place to live and work and visit. Paddy’s Market does not fit with that ambition”⁷¹.

Traders, understandably, were disgusted by the language deployed by senior City Council officials, and by the chronic lack of tolerance for the people who shop and trade at Paddy’s Market: “It is important as part of Glasgow’s history,” said Hazel McGeachin, “but what’s more important is that it’s needed. A lot of my customers are pensioners, asylum seekers, foreign workers. They need a place as cheap as this”⁷². Michael Burns, meanwhile, said the council are turning their back on Glasgow’s working class heritage. Many traders, according to the *Scotland on Sunday*, believed that what was going on was ‘yuppification’ ahead of the Commonwealth Games, while many linked the situation with recent protests about land use in Pollok Park and the Botanic Gardens⁷³. Brian Daly, a spokesman for the Paddy’s market committee, said the Market played a vital role in providing affordable second-hand goods, as well as having a particular community role: “You can’t create a community like this, it just grows. It would be a shame to lose this unique piece of Glasgow’s heritage for the sake of creating a sterile precinct”⁷⁴.

While criminality, especially drug dealing, has been cited as the main reason to close the market down, traders have accused the City Council of stigmatising the market instead of dealing with the wider context of social polarisation in the area. In December, the *Sunday Herald* reported that a city centre task force set up to monitor the area



had acknowledged that that the main catalyst for crime was Hope House (a homeless hostel adjacent to the market). Strathclyde Police stressed that it wasn’t the traders of Paddy’s Market who were the main causes of crime: Hope House was seen as “a major crime generator”, due to the large amount of homeless drug-addicts it houses, and thus the inevitable presence of dealers to service the addiction. Moreover, traders complained that the vast majority of crime in the market area takes place in the evenings when the market area effectively becomes a public lane. Market traders, however, close up by 2pm every day⁷⁵. The debate then, has been constructed not only about the viability of Paddy’s Market, but of criminality in the area *per se*, and of its unsuitability for the new types of economic activity to be associated with the cultural quarter and the Merchant City overall. The City’s regeneration convener, Councillor Ryan, expressed the intended message quite brutally: “It is the death-knell for the anti-social element. We want to move all that out. We want to up the bar of what we expect of a market right in the heart of the city. We want to bring in a better class of retail there”⁷⁶.

Entrepreneurial Statecraft

The highly disproportionate reaction to, and policing of, Paddy’s Market, can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial statecraft. In an excellent study by Roy Coleman, Steve Tombs and Dave Whyte⁷⁷, they show how an emphasis on selective ‘crime and disorder’ issues reinforces a narrow sense of harm and danger in the city and forecloses scrutiny of the city-building process itself. They label this process ‘governing through crime’, but ask: what kinds of crime are cities and citizens being governed through? With the expansion of public private partnerships in the city, and business ever more entrenched in increasingly corporatised ‘regeneration’ processes, the ‘moral capital’ of business ideology has attained hegemonic status within regeneration discourses: “private enterprise, entrepreneurship, the pursuit of wealth and something called the ‘market’ have all become valorised as ends in themselves”⁷⁸. This elevation of business influence, the authors argue, has led to an *over*-regulation of the poor and marginalised who dare to interrupt the fetishised surface of the commodity realm, and an *under*-regulation of ‘hidden’ corporate crime and harm.

While the authors applaud efforts to critically scrutinise all those regulatory and disciplinary modes and discourses of governance like CCTV networks, targeting of beggars and the homeless, and policing ‘hotspots’, they argue for a shift of emphasis away from analysis of the heavily regulated spaces of consumption, to the underregulated spaces of production. The report usefully places the emphasis on *corporate crime or harm*, which has a catastrophic economic, physical and social cost, yet remains almost entirely absent from crime and disorder debates. The concept of corporate ‘harm’ is reserved for those acts of omissions which produce degradation of natural

and physical environments and injuries to and exploitation of workers and consumers, but which do not violate any legal code. Here, the authors note that those regulatory frameworks that impinge on, or, disrupt flows of production or consumption are routinely removed from dominant definitions of crime and disorder by a complex nexus of social and legal procedures. The authors point in particular at the UK wide deregulation of occupational safety and health, and breaches of consumer and environmental protection. For instance, the services sector, so central to the functioning of the consumption-led neoliberal city (with its tourism, cafes, bars and restaurants), is regulated largely by Environment Health Officers (EHOs), yet in a time of proliferating expansion in the industry, the authors cite a UK-wide 50% drop in full-time officials between 1996/7 and 2000/1, while half of all local authorities failed to lay one single prosecution in 2000/1. Another example is road traffic. The increase of commercial activity in cities is primarily dependent on the circulation of commodities by road transport: deadly air pollution, and a host of other negative social and environmental impacts are a concomitant by-product of this process⁷⁹.

While the study makes an important intervention in debates around crime and harm discourses, they may have left the most compelling crimes out of their research field. In 1991, Frederic Jameson felt compelled to remind his readers of an obvious but frequently repressed fact: “...namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror”⁸⁰. Recent revelations about Primark’s (Argyle Street) ‘cheap-enough-to-chuck’ clothing being manufactured by sub-contracted child labour in India⁸¹, and Tesco’s (Argyle Street) continued abuse of its monopoly power through the exploitation of labour in China, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh⁸², merely hint at the full-scale of global, not to say local, exploitation that underpins the spectacular commodity realm. Glasgow’s frequently boasted about position as one of the major retail shopping centers in Britain, masks and disavows a devastating trail of labour and environmental harm on a global scale. Yet, the trajectory of pro-business, entrepreneurial urbanism has led to a “stabilization of opportunity structures for corporate crimes and harms”, whilst the relatively powerless and weak are further exposed to the “punitive gaze of extended surveillance capacity”⁸³. While the stick is delivered to the traders of Paddy’s Market, Tesco Metro, that most potent exemplar of monopoly capitalism, middle-class consumption tastes and gentrification, is offered the carrot of ‘competitive’ lease rates to steal further up Argyle Street – an accomplished private-public corporate partner in the pioneering of new urban frontiers.

This Dull Rented World

In the context of Glasgow’s wider redevelopment and regeneration ambitions, the location of the cultural quarter in the Merchant City is far from accidental. It is hoped that the ‘arts led property strategy’ will act as a ‘regenerative tool’ for property development in the area, thereby increasing ‘external investment confidence’ in the enormous gap site at St.Enoch car park and the ‘unproductive’ buildings and land at the Bridgegate by the River Clyde. City support for a ‘cultural quarter’, and the extremely heavy-handed and selective policing of the Merchant City, especially Paddy’s Market, can be seen as parallel strategies of boosterism and stigmatization: on the one hand, to encourage gentrification, on the other to legitimise it. Developers’ plans to explore the potential for a mixed-use redevelopment of the Union Railway bridge and the Hope House homeless hostel adjacent to Paddy’s Market⁸⁴, reflect City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow plans to extend the Merchant City down to the River Clyde as part of the delivery of the enormous 13-mile, £5.6 billion Clyde Waterfront development project⁸⁵. ‘The Step Change for Glasgow Action Plan To 2013’ makes clear that the ‘redevelopment’ of Paddy’s Market is a central part of the ‘Arts Led Property Strategy’: a key ‘indicative output’ for growing the metropolitan core.

As part of the same ‘Step Change’ plan to move Glasgow up “the value chain”, the removal of “barriers to growth and success” is seen as prerequisite for economic expansion. For the city center elite, backed by a whole panoply of civilising and criminal discourses, the solution to the problems of poverty, homelessness and drug addiction seem to be simple: removal and disavowal. In this potentially problematic context, the ‘creativity fix’ comes into its own as a ‘soft policy’ legitimization tool: “A creative strategy is easily bolted on to business-as-usual urban-development policies, while providing additional ideological cover for market-driven or state-assisted programs of gentrification. Inner-city embourgeoisement, in the creativity script, is represented as a necessary prerequisite for economic development: hey presto, thorny political problem becomes competitive asset!”⁸⁶.

The Creativity Fix is most insidious when it assumes that *every* city can win in the battle for talent and growth. Creativity scripts, however, are better understood as “zero-sum” urban strategies constituted within the context of uneven urban growth patterns in an increasingly polarized framework of inter-city competition. Intercity competition, as Harvey observed, has come to act as an external coercive power over urban governments, forcing them to adopt increasingly ‘flexible’, pro-business urban strategies that tend to enhance rather than constrict the mobility and ‘external coercive power’ of global finance capital. Cities are thus compelled to become collaborators in their own subordination to capital accumulation strategies. The result of these entrepreneurial strategies, Peck reminds us, has been the weak emulation of “winning” formulas, “quickly stacking the odds against even the most enthusiastic of converts”⁸⁷. As Peck astutely observes, the ‘creativity fix’ is less a solution to these problems and more a response to them. For all its aesthetic pretensions the ‘creative economy’, as Florida happily acknowledges, is underpinned by predatory venture capital: “Venture capital and the broader system that surrounds it provide a powerful catalyst to the chain of creativity and an even more powerful mechanism for bringing its fruits to the commercial market”⁸⁸. Glasgow’s adherence to the creativity script is merely another soft policy option for compliant forms of corporate welfare, regressive social redistribution and ‘trickle-up’ economics. In fact, precisely the same forms of compliance that has allowed neo-liberal forms of capitalism to lead us into the deepest global recession since the 1930s.

This is the third part of a trilogy on Glasgow’s gentrification for *Variant*: ‘The Clyde Gateway: A New Urban Frontier’, *Variant*, issue 33, Winter 2008; ‘Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space’, *Variant*, issue 25, Spring 2006

Notes

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1. Mattock

A mattock is a hand tool similar to a pickaxe. It is distinguished by the head, which is suitable for digging or breaking up moderately hard ground.

Inscription,

If they come for the innocent without stepping over your body, cursed be your religion and your life.

D Berrigan

cuir stad le cogadh, put a stop to the (genocidal) war!

Activist History,

Pitstop Ploughshares Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon, Damien Moran & Ciaron O'Reilly disarm U.S. Navy war plane at Shannon Airport in build up to U.S. invasion of Iraq on Feb. 3rd 2003. Plane changes course does not go to war theatre but returns to base in Texas for repair. Does not fly for two months. Irish Army deployed to Shannon. Four U.S. companies transporting troops to build up for invasion of Iraq refuse to land at Shannon as consequence of action. U.S. military estimate damage at \$U.S.2.5 million. Activists spend varied times on remand in Limerick Prison, 1-3 months. Acquitted at third trial at Dublin's Four Courts, August 2006.

2. Ball-peen

A type of peening hammer used in metal working.

Inscription,

Put a stop to war, stad le cogadh

Activist History,

Pitstop Ploughshares Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon, Damien Moran & Ciaron O'Reilly disarm U.S. Navy war plane at Shannon Airport in build up to U.S. invasion of Iraq on Feb. 3rd 2003. Plane changes course does not go to war theatre but returns to base in Texas for repair. Does not fly for two months. Irish Army deployed to Shannon. Four U.S. companies transporting troops to build up for invasion of Iraq refuse to land at Shannon as consequence of action. U.S. military estimate damage at \$U.S.2.5 million. Activists spend varied times on remand in Limerick Prison, 1-3 months. Acquitted at third trial at Dublin's Four Courts, August 2006.

3. Ball-peen

A type of peening hammer used in metal working.

Inscription,

The War Stops Here

Activist History,

Pitstop Ploughshares Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon, Damien Moran & Ciaron O'Reilly disarm U.S. Navy war plane at Shannon Airport in build up to U.S. invasion of Iraq on Feb. 3rd 2003. Plane changes course does not go to war theatre but returns to base in Texas for repair. Does not fly for two months. Irish Army deployed to Shannon. Four U.S. companies transporting troops to build up for invasion of Iraq refuse to land at Shannon as consequence of action. U.S. military estimate damage at \$U.S.2.5 million. Activists spend varied times on remand in Limerick Prison, 1-3 months. Acquitted at third trial at Dublin's Four Courts, August 2006.

4.Cross-peen Hammer

A traditional Blacksmiths, or Metal workers Hammer

Inscription,

Faith in Jesus is Freedom

The War Stops Here

Activist History,

Pitstop Ploughshares Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon, Damien Moran & Ciaron O'Reilly disarm U.S. Navy war plane at Shannon Airport in build up to U.S. invasion of Iraq on Feb. 3rd 2003. Plane changes course does not go to war





theatre but returns to base in Texas for repair. Does not fly for two months. Irish Army deployed to Shannon. Four U.S. companies transporting troops to build up for invasion of Iraq refuse to land at Shannon as consequence of action. U.S. military estimate damage at \$U.S.2.5 million. Activists spend varied times on remand in Limerick Prison, 1-3 months. Acquitted at third trial at Dublin's Four Courts, August 2006.

5. Ball-peen

A type of peening hammer used in metal working.

Inscription,

No More War

War Never Again

Activist History,

\$U.S. 7 million ploughshares hammer as used by:

Anzus Plowshares Moana Cole, Susan Frankel, Ciaron O' Reilly & Fr. Bill Streit disarm B-52 Bomber at Rome Air Force Base, New York, VSA, on eve of Gulf War 1 - Jan 1st. '91 Plane grounded for two months. USAF estimate damage at \$U.S.100,000 - sentenced to a year in prison.

Bae Ploughshares Chris Cole disarms European Fighter Aircraft, Hawk Strike Attack Aircraft & military equipment destined to East Timor & Northern Ireland at BAe Stevenage, Herts., England on Jan 6th. 1993. Police estimate £300,000. Sentenced to eight months imprisonment.

Seeds of Hope/East Timor Ploughshares Lotta Kronlid, Andrea Needham, Jo Wlson & Angie ZeIter disarm BAe Hawk Fighter in Indonesian Air Force markings on eve of intended export to Indonesian military at war on East Timor at BAe Warton, Lancashire on January 29th. 1996. Police damage estimate £2,400,000. Indonesian government rejects that specific plane following action. Activists held on remand for six months in prison, acquitted by jury at trial in Liverpool, July 1996.

Jubilee Ploughshares 2000 Fr. Martin Newell & Susan Van Der Hiden disarm nuclear convoy vehicle at RAF Wittering, England on November 3rd. 2000. Police estimate damage at £32,000. Sentenced to one year imprisonment.

Pitstop Ploughshares Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon, Damien Moran & Ciaron O'Reilly disarm U.S. Navy war plane at Shannon Airport in build up to U.S. invasion of Iraq on Feb. 3rd 2003. Plane changes course does not go to war theatre but returns to base in Texas for repair. Does not fly for two months. Irish Army deployed to Shannon. Four U.S. companies transporting troops to build up for invasion of Iraq refuse to land at Shannon as consequence of action. U.S. military estimate damage at \$U.S.2.5 million. Activists spend varied times on remand in Limerick Prison, 1-3 months. Acquitted at third trial at Dublin's Four Courts, August 2006.

'Every action will be judged on the particular circumstances.'

Seamus Nolan 2008

'Hammered by the Irish' by Harry Browne deals with the militarisation of Ireland's Shannon Airport in service of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The book tells the story of five Catholic Workers, known as the Pitstop Ploughshares www.peaceontrial.com, who in 2003 disable a U.S. war plane at Shannon causing \$U.S.2.5 million damage.

The five were demonised by the mainstream media and condemned by large sections of the anti-war movement. Their act of non-violent resistance was to resonate with a Dublin jury which unanimously found them not guilty of all charges at their third trial in 2006.

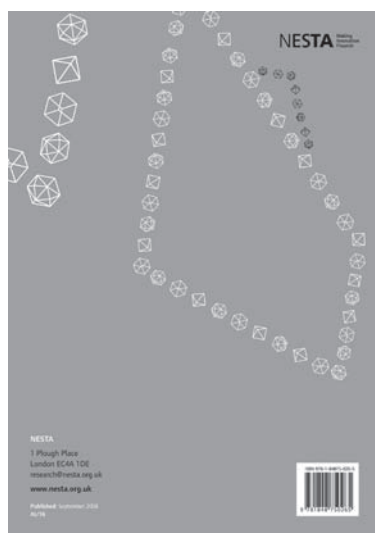
Harry Browne lectures in Dublin Institute of Technology. His book, 'Hammered by the Irish: How the Pitstop Ploughshares disabled a US war-plane - with Ireland's blessing', is forthcoming from Counterpunch.org Books.

Artists & Art Schools: For or against innovation?

A reply to NESTA

Angela McRobbie & Kirsten Forkert

The recently published report from NESTA (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts) by Kate Oakley, Brooke Sperry and Andy Pratt and Brooke Sperry, entitled 'The Art of Innovation: How Fine Arts Graduates Contribute to Innovation' (2008) provides us with an opportunity to offer a series of reflections on a number of topics. These include: links between the art schools and the 'creative economy'; the nature of cultural policy and the role of consultancy research; the rise of creative labour and its social consequences. The art school sector of higher education – from fine arts right across the spectrum of provision, including graphic design, fashion design, but also all the many courses in ceramics, textiles, film, multi-media, jewellery, theatre design furniture design and so on – has recently attracted attention for the reason that it is claimed to produce not just pathways into employment, but employment itself, and a special kind of employment which is frequently flexible, casualised, (mostly) self-employment. Creativity is a doubly useful concept, not just for its value-producing capacity in production, but also, as Bourdieu argued, because it confers status on its workforce, even when conditions are punitive (1993). The art schools are expected to train, educate and prepare this workforce, but there are very few extended studies of these public-funded institutions. Frith and Horne (1987) provided a cultural history of the relationship between UK art schools from the late 1950s onwards and the remarkable growth of British pop music, and McRobbie (1998), in her study of young fashion designers, most of whom had graduated from Central St Martins School of Art and Design in London, included interviews with heads of department of fashion and/or textiles in the UK in order to gain insight into the different pedagogies which had proved so influential in the training of so many world-leading young designers in the decade from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. Like Frith and Horne, McRobbie refers to the handful of earlier historical accounts of the art school, but she also acknowledges the paucity of research on the influence of this sector of education in the wider world of art and design. The interviews she carried out were a means of creating a picture of how fashion design came to be established, and the kind of people, usually pioneering women, who set themselves the task of fighting to gain academic recognition for what had been considered a poor relative of fine arts and design, a decorative, trivial, non-academic area of study. The interviewees in that study were, in effect, living archives since so little of that history had been properly assembled. And as McRobbie points out, one of the reasons that fashion design eventually gained recognition inside arts schools like the Royal College of Art was because astute Vice-Chancellors saw that (usually female) heads of fashion and textiles were more willing than others to forge links with fashion retailers and manufacturers. In this respect fashion education has long been at the forefront of what has now become a standard feature of higher education:



knowledge transfer, industry-links, sponsorship, placements and so on.

Given the expansion of numbers of students into the art schools suggested by the NESTA report, and the ways in which these institutions also offer pathways of access to young people, some of them disadvantaged and with non-standard academic qualifications¹, it is easy to understand why they have attracted the attention of educational and cultural policy-makers in recent years. But it was very much a matter of Principals and Vice Chancellors lobbying at the doorsteps of

government office, not the other way round. They saw that practice-based training in newer areas like digital media, game development, and also in media and performance arts, were opening up new occupational pathways and they realised this had a lot to do with the training the students were getting in inevitably under-funded institutions. At the exact same time, academics and policy makers, in particular those involved in urban regeneration, made a similar connection between young people's cultural activities and the so-called 'creative city' (Landry 2000). This latter became the roller coaster we are all now familiar with, culminating in the enormous attention given to Richard Florida's 'The Rise of the Creative Class' (2003). From economic geography to sociology, from cultural studies to philosophy, from media studies to art theory, the rallying cry of the culture or creative industries has drawn academics in Europe and the US to reflect on and analyse these activities. As soon as the UK's Department of Culture Media and Sport 'Mapping Documents' were published, and prior to that in 1996 when the Creative Industries Taskforce was set up, academics found themselves torn between supporting the new agenda which required working closer with government agencies and drafting policy agendas which fitted with the prevailing vocabularies set by these departments, and establishing a more autonomous critical and theoretical language to understand such developments.

Despite these flurries of activity very little was known about how these sectors actually functioned and especially how they gave rise to new working conditions. The Department of Trade and Industry in the 1990s professed little or no interest in tiny micro-outfits of just two or three people working in a 'cottage industry' style, but by the early 2000s there were various roundtables hosted at the DCMS, which had stepped forward as the government department best equipped to deal with the new creative economy. Often these meetings delivered relatively little for academic researchers, since the nature of the discussions was rigidly set within a prevailing political agenda. A resolution of sorts was found in the extent to which the funding councils recognised this as a new area for which research funds could be competitively applied for. Cultural policy studies had of course existed long before this sequence of events, but it gathered pace and momentum as this new sector came to the forefront of political attention, (for a

critical overview see Scullion and Garcia 2005). Nevertheless cultural policy research, connected as it usually is with arts councils, or departments of culture, remains relatively marginal and even one-dimensional in comparison, say, with public policy research which inevitably has a much wider remit in regard to urban issues, housing, poverty, policing, crime, etc. At the European level, the new 'precarity activists', many of whom are artists or new media workers connected to EuroMayDay, do a great job of forging connections between arts, artists and culture, and social global issues, including housing and unemployment (and indeed this frames the ongoing research of Forkert²). And, from the early 2000s, these networks introduced, especially within European cultural policy, a much more animated and theoretically informed agenda – see for example <<http://www.eipcp.net>>, and also curators turned policy-advocates such as Maria Lind and Raimund Minichbauer (2005)³. This work is sharply critical, with a theoretically-informed framework (transculturation, globalisation, network society, neo-nationalism) and a focus on geo-cultural issues, and on regional and sub-regional, urban, local, national and transnational cultural policy in practice (see also Robins 2006).

In contrast, the kind of research undertaken by NESTA is primarily consultative⁴. NESTA is an endowment which was set up in 1998 with the mission of making 'the UK more innovative'⁵. The focus on entrepreneurialism and innovation brings it close to the priorities of the DCMS and it also fits the "general Schumpeterian⁶ vision that now underpins much national and European Union economic policy under the 'information society' label focused on innovation systems and national competition for the comparative advantage that successful innovation supposedly creates" (Garnham 2005:22). The context of NESTA and the focus on innovation have considerable bearing on 'The Art of Innovation', beginning with the suggestion that artists are inherently innovative, that they are resourceful and adapt easily to changing circumstances. The executive summary points out that "artists have attitudes and skills that are conducive to innovation" (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008: 5), that they are "brokers across disciplines" who continually retrain themselves and that their style of working is project- and portfolio-based. The emphasis on innovation shapes many of the questions put to the respondents, and, as we show below, this actually jars with the artists' chosen way of talking about or analysing their own working practices, suggesting something of a mismatch, as if the term is foisted upon them.

The NESTA study comes under the label of consultancy work, drawing on the expertise of well established academics like Andy Pratt (LSE), Kate Oakley, an independent consultant,⁷ and researcher Brooke Sperry. For this very reason, it provides a good example of the kind of work undertaken under these established guidelines, where it is possible to detect the tensions which arise as the authors juggle with a language and an agenda set by the host organisation. The study is ambitious, given the timescale of just nine months. A questionnaire was sent to 8,000 graduates from the University of the Arts, dating back to the 1950s, using their previously unused alumni association. With a 6.4% success rate the authors contacted 40 of these respondents most of whom lived in or around London, and

were predominantly female and white⁸. These autobiographical interviews actually provide the most significant material in the research. The authors allow the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents to express things in their own words and methodological attention is devoted to justifying this. The outcome of the interviews and the email questionnaire are valuable and interesting; attention is drawn to job juggling, low income, collaborations, and unexpected opportunities which can nevertheless be made good use of.

Our own reading of this report points to three areas for further discussion: the low income of artists; the inappropriateness of language and conceptual vocabulary drawn from business or science and technology; the strengths and limitations of consultancy research.

Jobs without capital

The authors provide information gleaned from the study about the actual levels of income of the respondents. In effect these are tiny. The incomes of these artists and creative people are well below the poverty line, but the word ‘poor’ does not appear in the considerations of salaries (e.g. gross annual income from all sources 30% £10,000, and 55% under £20,000). This is significant. For a start it corresponds with the findings of McRobbie a decade earlier, who showed that young fashion designers, even those who were well-established and receiving a lot of press support, were actually earning extremely small take home pay, often less than £20,000 per annum. This led McRobbie to argue repeatedly that working in the new creative work was low capital return work. “Jobs without capital” was how she put it, inverting Beck’s notion of a new world of “capital without jobs” (Beck: 1997). Following Ulrich Beck she talked about “being poor in work” rather than poor and out of work. For middle class graduates – a high proportion of whom are female – this is a significant and under-acknowledged fact. We can see the field of poverty extending and incorporating the young, well-qualified, ambitious and highly motivated – in other words, those supposedly positioned to succeed within the new economy. But the question of how it is possible to live on less than £15,000 a year in a city like London in 2008 is skirted over or ignored. The word ‘poverty’ of course would go against the grain of the need of government to promote this sector of work, not just because they wish to promote individuals and invest highly in it through education and training but because the style of working is increasingly being looked to as a model for other sectors to follow. Does this mean the ‘working poor’ develops as a new norm? Yes it probably does. If effective, there will be a lot more people self-employed and fewer employers faced with the ‘burden’ of a payroll, pensions and other benefits. This fact is borne out by the references to the expansion of the creative industries (though this is as much to do with how the figures are, highly problematically, calculated) and the 60% increase in art and design graduates in the last ten years⁹. Mention of poverty would detract from the connotations of glamour, aspiration and enthusiasm attached to creativity. And anyway, starting with Thatcherism, ‘poverty’ has been designated and naturalised as a matter of individual failure rather than a consequence of the re-structuring of manufacture and production, the destruction of the welfare state and various other systemic features of global capitalism. The result is that in a context like this poverty could only be understood, if it was discussed, as a sign of personal poor choices in regard to creative work, or of “individual mismanagement” (Bauman 2000, Brown 2006).

Nowadays for young artists or designers to identify with a self-description as poor, would be synonymous with failure and with stigma. If artists like those interviewed in this study have a degree of pride about their work, and self-confessed enjoyment of it and commitment to it, then they too will most likely shun the word poor. They will instead talk about the hardships they have had to endure in order to carry on with ‘the work’. Perhaps it is the job of academic researchers or social scientists to prise open the everyday realities of this ‘new poor middle-class’, examining

material issues in depth which words like ‘bohemian’ do not really encompass. Let us at least take this opportunity to flag up the importance of examining in more depth questions of borderline poor income and dependency on state benefits which are the norm among artists for at least some periods. In this report the authors steer well clear of dealing with unpleasanties such as poverty in work, merely referring in passing, for example to the “less desirable” aspects of such work including “[work] that is unpaid” (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008: 12). The reality of unpaid work or long term internships also cries out for fuller analysis. After all, we are talking about long hours of labour which will often be uncompensated (and thereby also result in unaccrued state benefit entitlements). In his study of internet workers, Andrew Ross’s apt but nevertheless under-developed term “net slaves” just opens the door on a sizeable and significant strata of this workforce (Ross 2004). To sum up the degrees of hardship and the experience of what would normally be called poverty require more systematic attention. It may be that these graduates are lifted from the absolutely degrading aspects and connotations of poverty because they possess high cultural capital, and because they can rely, just and no more, on partners, or on extended family, as well as on a trickle of grants, commissions, benefits and other sources of public money so that they can get through from one month to the next. The downside of being an artist is also compensated for by the relatively high value attached to this identity socially, but this means that poverty can remain hidden and unacknowledged by public bodies. This is compounded in a study like this where the conceptual framework is borrowed from science, technology and business; in other words, a high-income world unaccustomed to and hence ill-equipped to deal with or even imagine, economic survival concerns like poverty, ‘dole’, housing benefits or income support. And likewise when the respondents describe how they have set-up in business it also transpires that this transition into what is presumably self-employment has actually been accomplished thanks to the existence of state benefits (such as tax credits) and other forms of income support lifting them out of being unemployed.



Imposing a vocabulary

The authors also make pervasive use of the words markets and consumers, and on several occasions this leads them to impose on their respondents a vocabulary which appears to be quite at odds with how the artists express themselves. Taking their cue from Lester and Piore (2004), the authors’ report comments on how these fine arts graduates and others like them are highly active “consumers” of other art-related work or “cultural products” and this gives them sharp insight into what consumers want (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008:14). That is, they will have greater insight into how the market will respond to what they produce, and they will also be able to tailor their work to fit with market trends. But what is actually being referred to here is not a matter of markets and consumers but rather that this group of people are constantly engaging with the world of cultural forms, artefacts, and symbolic material which relates to their own interests and their professional expertise (note the word ‘professionals’ is barely used). Not surprisingly, these people know about new films, or about current exhibitions, they are frequently reading, they are in effect an intellectual social strata. It is a misnomer to categorise them as consumers

of, for example, the Louise Bourgeois exhibition or as consumers of Dostoevsky novels. The fact that the respondents refer to these specific cultural forms is more about the inspiration, ideas and intellectual engagement they derive from this material, than it is about being a consumer of great works of art. This is akin to describing sociologists as ‘consumers’ of peer-reviewed academic journals. Hardly surprisingly, the authors seem to exhibit some discomfort with their own vocabulary. They explain that perhaps what this kind of consumer-activity does is give the artists ideas and something like a feel, if not for possible markets for their own work, at least for their potential ‘audiences’. The artists in turn shy away from the words market and ideal users and reflect instead on how and where the work might be responded to. They are in some ways too truculent a group to allow themselves to be turned into spokespersons for innovation. One even says that her work might be too innovative for the market, i.e. non-commercial (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008:27), another says it is “just art work” (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008:7). In a sense the survey seems to be pushing respondents into a box they have never really considered inhabiting voluntarily. If there is a degree of misfit here, we might wonder why? It could be that artists of the sort who responded to this survey questionnaire, male and female, although they are mostly female, attribute to their work an entirely different set of social values. And this may be generally true for fine artists. Anyone who has actually taught in an art school will know that fine art students have tended to define themselves in opposition to commercial or market values, even if what they produce in many cases are saleable objects. Indeed they are probably taught to reject the idea of producing for a market. Their commitment to the ‘work itself’ takes precedence, they will concentrate on this and then hope that it gets taken up by the wider art world. Of course some will, especially these days, have learnt skills of self-promotion and might have developed entrepreneurial strategies. But even here, the emphasis remains on the work itself. The question in the years following graduation is how to retain time and commitment to the work in the hope that it is successful; success meaning shows, reviews, commissions, and possibly sales. Since this is an ideal scenario, realistic for only a handful, the alternative strategy involves taking on other jobs as the authors of the report confirm, this being in any case a well established fact (Menger: 1999; Throsby and Hollister: 2003). But this career trajectory is quite different from, let us say, graphic designers, who again if one has taught them one knows that from the start of their education they are working almost consistently to briefs set by industry. The studio atmosphere in the graphic design spaces is quite different from that of the fine art department. Graphic design students will surround themselves with images from advertising, comics and magazines, they will have work placements and internships. They will hope that their design work will attract the attention of commercial design agencies, eventually winning them employment. In short, from the start graphic design students are oriented to the commercial world of advertising, while their fine art counterparts will at least feign disinterest, with some privately hoping for ‘commercial success’ which is something quite different. To sum up, it could be suggested that what this report shows is how degrees of realism kick in not so long after graduation when the artists begin to see clearly that they will have to develop skills which will get them more regular and better paid work. The jobs they will gravitate towards, or which they will embark on some additional training to prepare themselves for, will be commensurate with their qualifications and expertise, and as the survey shows they are well placed to get jobs in the cultural sector, in education, in public services like health, education and art therapy. The role played by the distinctive training they have had at art school, the unstructured studio time, the one-to-one sessions with both tutors and technicians, will have given them a sense of the value of learning, for example, new technical skills based on the needs of each project. And the impact which tutors can have in pointing students in the direction of relevant work, articles, other artists, writers and philosophers whose work might help

them engage with the issues they are struggling with in their own practice, might well produce an openness to and awareness of this as an important way of refining their ‘own work’. Thus we might say that pedagogy prepares them not so much for the market or to keep their eyes on consumer trends as to give them ideas about what kind of jobs would be interesting or rewarding and how to pick up the necessary skills and experience, if it proves impossible to make a living from art itself.



Researching the researchers

Finally, there is the point about the strengths and limitations of consultancy research. A study like this is able to draw on a wide range of academic studies which provide, if not the intellectual framework at least a field of references which feed into the authors’ discussion of their findings. Our aim in the foregoing text has not been to devalue this kind of consultancy undertaking (although we do detect a tendency to avoid the ‘bad news’ regarding low levels of income and dependency on benefits). As Scullion and Garcia point out, although this kind of research “makes it difficult to develop a coherent body of research and near impossible to develop longitudinal projects”, nevertheless it does allow social and cultural researchers to access to “the processes of decision-making and policy evaluation” (Scullion and Garcia: 2005: 122). Indeed we could argue that think tanks and consultancies play a key role in the new creative economies, insofar as they pick up on government thinking by virtue of being close at hand, they tender for and often win contracts to carry out research which will in one way or another further the agendas set by government, and depending themselves on this kind of revenue they will also then promote themselves as offering high degrees of expertise which can combine and draw on leading academic research with the pragmatics of working close to government. This puts agencies like NESTA at the forefront of the knowledge economy. And as Garnham argues, it has been the association of culture with IT that has allowed the term ‘creative industries’ to emerge as a government favourite in the contribution this sector makes to economic development (Garnham 2005). The picture does not look quite so favourable if, as McRobbie points out, IT and new media are subtracted from the more recent DCMS ‘Mapping Document’; without these areas of activity, the remaining culture industries produce much more modest returns (McRobbie 2004). If consultancies do indeed have this important role to play in effect formulating the terms in which creative industries and the knowledge economy come to be spoken about then the idea of researching the researchers, as Pierre Bourdieu might put it, would be a timely undertaking. These organisations differ enormously, from those which literally speak to government (such as Demos or NESTA) to others which tender for grants for social and cultural projects in competition with better funded and prestigious universities, to whom they feel themselves to be poorer relatives.

The NESTA report confirms the fact that in the last decades artists have become people who are working across a range of sectors. When they’re working in non-arts related jobs, they are more likely to work in education or health care, and this suggests a close connection with education and the public sector. Overall we might even say that artists make a contribution, not primarily through innovation for the commercial sector, but through the value their input brings to the social field. This has also been the case for many years, especially for the majority of artists who do not make the ‘big time’. Artists, photographers and film makers have

since the 1960s been drafted into public art and community projects, hence the term ‘community arts’. The point is that now this has become massively enlarged¹⁰. Our reading of NESTA finds an unofficial picture which underpins these working lives which includes poverty and hardship, tolerated perhaps because of the availability of unspecified cushions. There is a close proximity to or experience of receiving benefits and income support, from the state or through family ties. We also see a vigorous denial of the language of markets and consumers, and a rather awkward or at least reflective response to the word ‘innovation’, as though it suggests something quite different from the way in which artists typically think about or talk about their work. Overall we see the role of not just the state in the form of benefits and subsidy, but also the state as educator, and the public sector as a frequent point to which the graduates gravitate for work. We might even propose that artists have become a new form of non-bureaucratic civil servants. However, unlike Claire Bishop and others who have decried this as art turning into social work (Bishop: 2006), we are calling for greater examination of the conditions under which this takes place. What in our own research we perceive are, again, part-time contracts, artists indeed inserted into the field of social problems, such as tackling bullying in schools, and inevitably more and more ‘projects’¹¹ – the irony being, of course, that artists themselves are likely to suffer, in some form, from the multiple effects of deprivation. We finish then with some further questions, the first being what role does the art work itself play as it leaves the studios and circulates across so many different locations, from galleries and exhibition spaces, to community centres, to schools, to hospitals, to board rooms, corridors, perhaps even streets and other public spaces? Can the simple presence of art be considered as innovation? If so, then what is really meant by ‘innovation’ (the authors of the report do not define this)? Innovation to the landscape? Or innovation in public transport for the values other than those of advertising which it introduces? And finally, if one of the decisive features which shapes the inventive and energetic ways in which these artists carry on working throughout their lives is the experience they got from attending art school, then what would be the dire consequence of these being run down, or subjected to further financial constraints?

The important role of the art schools as state institutions with public funding is again underplayed in this report. Most UK art schools are now also part of large universities, and with government interest in creative industries this means that the changing world of the corporate university impinges particularly in these departments. One priority then might be to safeguard good practice in these historic institutions without romanticising them. Another might be to acknowledge the important role played by access routes into art schools for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds; it is also to pay attention to the role of rising fees (and by consequence, increasing student debt) in making this access much more difficult. Frith and Horne make the connection between the opportunity for working class, mostly male, youth in ’60s Britain to get to art school and the way in which that experience and the unstructured fine art pedagogy permitted a cross-over between the external world of pop music, and the development of new forms of pop from inside those art school spaces. If then it is the art schools which are the key sites for the production of culture (fashion, music, art, etc.) it is not just then a question of defending their existence but dissecting what it is that has made them important to national cultural life and beyond. We want to end by emphasising a pedagogy which critically challenges the divide between high and low culture and which contests the isolated status of the fine arts. Fine art students might well seek to define themselves against commerce, but they are theoretically aware of the intersections of art with media and popular culture. They know how frequently the shock effects of art can give rise to media ‘moral panics’. In short, art school graduates, by virtue of the cultural and social theory courses which have been a set part of the curriculum, have a keen understanding of how social cultural and media

worlds work, including their own role as artists within these realms. This reflexivity is perhaps overlooked by the authors of the NESTA Report, even though there are clear signs of such critical self-awareness in the responses. Might government then be persuaded of the art schools as the source of social, cultural and economic value and of livelihoods? Our argument in relation to NESTA is that the vocabulary of innovation is something of a discursive imposition. Where this might be applicable with graduates in design, in particular industrial or product design, in this current context there is a mismatch between the working lives of fine art graduates, and the economic presumptions of innovation.

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Notes

- At this point in time, application to some undergraduate art design programs do not require A-Levels and can be accessed through the BTEC or other equivalent qualifications.
- Forkert, Kirsten. *Artistic Labour, and the Changing Nature of Work and Cities*. PhD Thesis, Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths. Forthcoming 2010.
- See *A Critique of Creative Industries*, organised by EIPCP and FRAME, which took place in Helsinki 31.8-2.9.2006. <http://eipcp.net/dlfiles/prog>
- Comedia used to undertake this kind of work, particularly with an emphasis on urban culture, regeneration, employment etc but with less focus on technology and industry, see Landry 2000.
- See NESTA’s website at <http://www.nesta.org.uk/about-us/>.
- Joseph Alois Schumpeter was an economist and political scientist who popularised the term “creative destruction” in economics, using it to describe a process in which the old ways of doing things are endogenously destroyed and replaced by new ways.
- Oakley worked with Charles Leadbeater whose book *Living on Thin Air* (2000) won the praise of the then PM Tony Blair, celebrated the entrepreneurial culture and talent led economy, citing figures like celebrity cooks as exemplars.
- They also post a survey questionnaire on the website for NESTA, Artquest and the Artists Information Company (A-N).
- Oakley, Sperry and Pratt: 2008: 12.
- In Art Work in 2007*, Susan Jones notes the growing role of public art commissions as an income source for artists. See http://www.a-n.co.uk/jobs_and_opps/article/414458
- See Jane Simpson’s contribution to the 2001 EU report *The Conditions of Creative Artists in Europe* available at: http://www.eu2001.se/culture/eng/docs/report_visby.pdf#search=%22Conditions%20for%20Creative%20Artists%20in%20Europe%22

Hunting, Fishing, & Shooting the Working Classes

Tom Jennings

With the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1984-85 miners strike upon us a certain amount of attention rehashing and probably remystifying that pivotal period in UK politics can be expected. Now consigned by the mainstream media safely to the past, moreover, the strike seems fair game for packaging in the heritage industry's procession of spectacles trivialising and sanitising historical significance. Quite how it could be spun to suit New Labour's threadbare corporate Cool Britannia formulations remains to be seen – especially given the preceding demonisation of the miners as the 'enemy within'. True, local areas most affected at the time and since should prove less amenable to such calumnies – yet, for example, while the combination of 'living history' with nostalgia persists at the annual Durham Miners' Gala (albeit with dwindling attendances), this heartland of militant mining culture¹ also hosts the original industrial theme park at nearby Beamish. Of course, a wide range of more faithful records of the 1984-5 events also exist in the public domain in the form of various archives and publications, but these tend to be created by and for specific constituencies and rarely impinge on general awareness.

One exception is Jeremy Deller's artwork *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), involving a full-scale re-enactment of the iconic confrontation between pickets and police at the South Yorkshire village and cokeworks. Mobilising massed ranks of military hobbyists and remaining participants from both sides of the June 1984 clash, Deller questioned the role of memory, documentation and media in personal and national history². But whatever value is ascribed to such enterprises, questions of the 'legacy' of the strike and the wider upheavals in British society it exemplified had already entered the popular imagination via cinematic treatments of the consequences of 1980s deindustrialisation. Here the social-realist tradition continues to provide visual narratives which take seriously the problems and possibilities of the everyday lives of ordinary working-class people, based on purportedly accurate accounts of lived experience which resist the commercial imperatives of more obviously recuperative genres like soap operas and 'reality TV'. Now, with the prospect of mass unemployment again looming – in addition to the working poor of increasingly casualised, insecure work patterns and impoverishment of substantial swathes of the population in the meantime – it seems pertinent to take stock. What follows sketches the patchy tradition of UK social-realism before considering a particularly consistent exponent – the Amber collective – whose 40th anniversary is also this year.

The Ambiguous Real

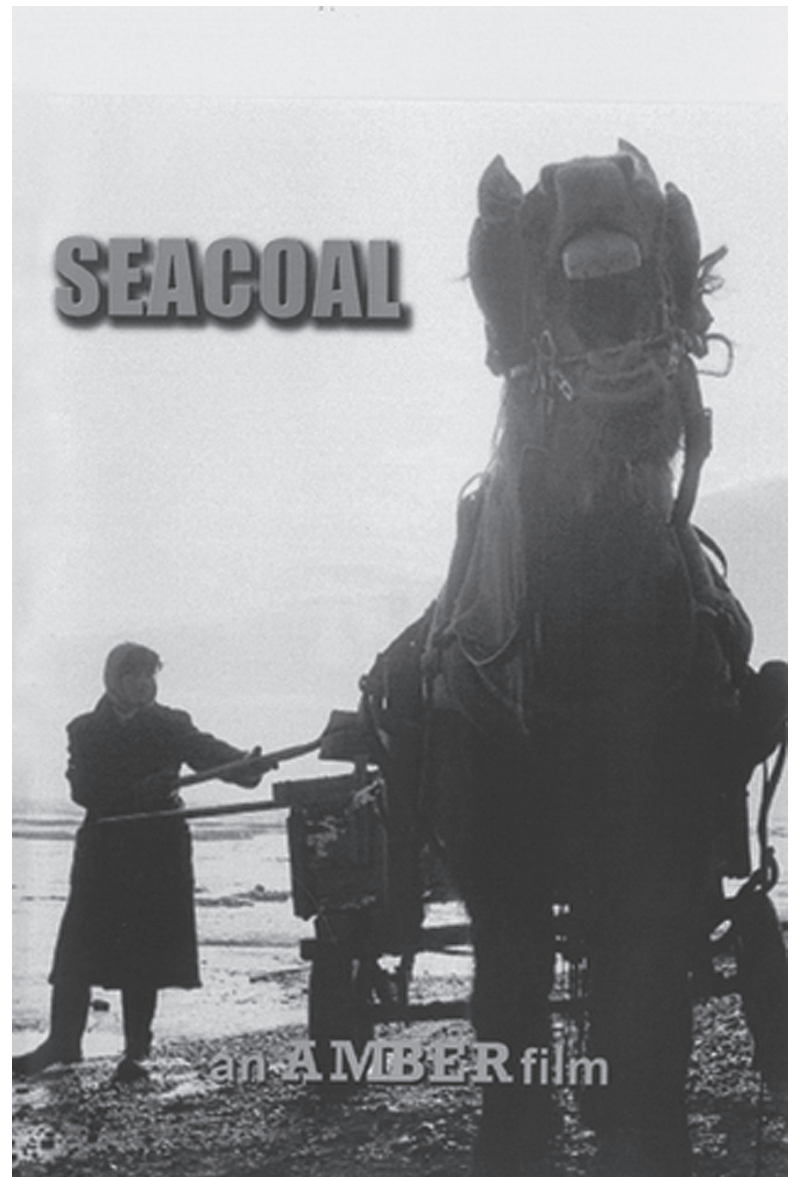
British social-realist film-making originated in the 1930s documentary movement's desire for the cinema to play a positive role in society beyond entertainment for profit. To its leading figure, John Grierson, the "creative interpretation of actuality" allowed the scientific capture of living patterns beneficial for state planning and control, educating those in charge and artistically enhancing a public sense of national unity – especially during the Second World War. The paternalism, patronisation and elitism of this vision, along with the intrusive middle-class voyeuristic tourism of Mass Observation's sociological-anthropological recording projects, still haunt the descendants of these traditions³ – who generally echo the humanist responses of Humphrey Jennings and other documentary directors of the time that their

aesthetic strategies were supposed to represent the lives of the objects of the camera's gaze so that the films 'belonged' to those portrayed, who otherwise remained invisible⁴.

Nevertheless, British realism sunk further into complacent conservatism in the postwar welfare state consensus which did, however, permit fractions of working-class youth into higher education and the cultural sector – whereupon a generation of Angry Young Men railed against the multiple alienations of 1950s mass bureaucratic society and consumerism. Meanwhile the international success and acclaim of Italian neorealist cinema's tragic, monumental portraits of lower-class characters transfixed in poverty helped prompt New Waves across Europe – including the highly successful Northern 'kitchen-sink' films of the 1960s which dramatised masculine dissatisfaction with the drudgeries of home, community and working life⁵. Then, when the 'swinging sixties' bewitched subsequent domestic cinema and spawned countless avant-garde and countercultural currents, socially-conscious film-makers like Ken Loach and Alan Clarke migrated into hard-edged 1970s 'public service' television drama, dissecting the dark underbelly of the steadily unravelling social-democratic settlement finally laid to rest by Thatcherism.

Amid widespread intellectual disorientation accompanying the Conservatives' brutal structural adjustments, 1980s British cinema is best characterised as predominantly escapist – whether to other times and places, or visiting the 'margins' of a political landscape where collective issues were rendered purely private personal problems ripe for coercive managerial or therapeutic intervention now that there was 'no such thing as society'. Those film-makers working within broadly realist paradigms heightened and twisted their characterisations and narratives to surreal degrees; delved into dreams and fantasies searching for the hope or pleasure apparently absent given prevailing conditions; and sought hitherto neglected milieus whose position, identity or culture was sufficiently visibly distinct from failing respectable lifestyles to offer novel routes for aspiration and social mobility. Most of all, long-shunned but eternally popular Hollywood genre conventions were resuscitated throughout the decade, offering cautionary tales of individual transcendence to console progressive film-makers and audiences alike.

Despite a welcome widening of perspectives from which experience might be considered 'authentic', however, the 1980s postmodern play of commodified differences and stylistic gymnastics couldn't indefinitely divert attention from intensifying economic inequality and the persistent chronic material deprivation of millions in the 1990s. Official discourse preferred fashionable sophistry concerning an abject 'underclass' socially-self-excluded from buying into credit-bubble consumerism, but established film-makers like Loach and Mike Leigh emphatically reaffirmed the blatant continued salience of social class, even if its co-ordinates were once again cut adrift from secure wages⁶. Other more visually and structurally innovative films variously glossed their honest 'miserabilism' with surrealism (e.g. *Trainspotting*, dir. Danny Boyle, 1995), expressionism (e.g. *Nil By Mouth*, dir. Gary Oldman, 1997)⁷, or – benefitting from New Labour rebranding – heritage nostalgia (e.g. *Brassed Off*, 1996, dir. Mark Herman) and sentimental manipulation and wish-fulfilment (*The Full Monty*, dir. Peter Cattaneo, 1997⁸; *Billy Elliott*, dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000), occasionally yielding box-office bonanzas.



These trends have continued across the millennium, though with a few new directors more confidently experimenting with social-realism, expression and genre in the 'independent' sector where funding is just as precarious as career prospects elsewhere⁹. Often themselves from humble backgrounds witnessing the damage to the social fabric, they tend to resist pandering to mainstream commercial/political/middle-class archetypes by demonising or romanticising the contemporary lower-classes. Instead more subtle and complex evocations of working-class social adaptation to hardship grope for germs of the creative solidarity capable, one day, of providing a basis for a decent workable future¹⁰. Paradoxically, unhinged from the heroic dignified menace of men's industrial labour, latent questions of social reproduction thus re-emerge from behind the means of production. And, as it happens, Amber had already been seeking hope in the face of such adversity in North East England, albeit less troubled by postmarxist and postmodernist prognostications.

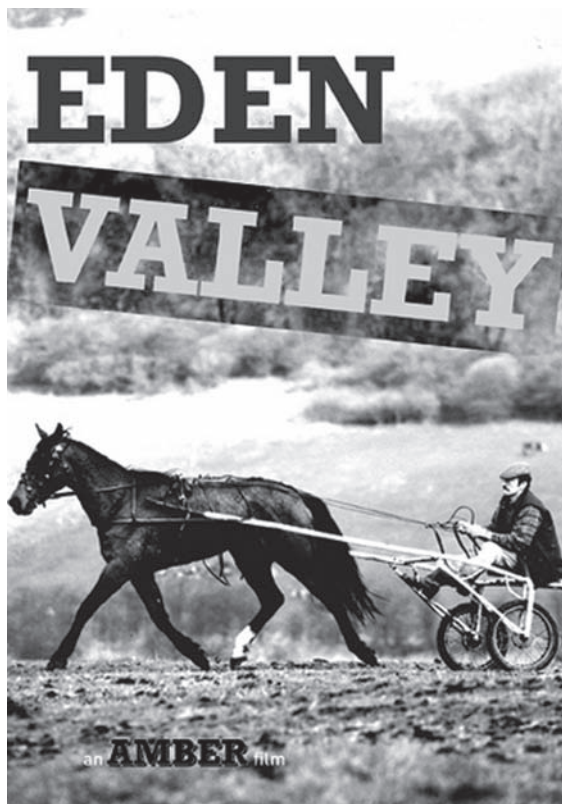
Amber Dexterity

Amber's original collectivists moved from London to Newcastle in 1969 to document working-class culture by living among and working with and for its inhabitants, and to record the area's embattled craft practices before they finally vanished. Through various accidents and artful dodges they eventually acquired city premises on the Tyne and set up a photographic gallery, workshops and cinema. In addition to regularly organising international exhibitions, the Side Gallery gradually established a unique and

extensive photography collection – but the ideal for the group’s own new work was maximal protracted immersion, building consultative trust in communities or situations before filming there. As well as yielding classic heroic documentary, experiments hybridising forms and methods – often well ahead of fashion – provided greater range and effectiveness¹¹. The cultural work attracted links with various grass-roots arts initiatives and often proceeded alongside activism and campaign work, including sustained support for the 1984-5 miners’ strike¹². But the desire to merge wider concerns in less urgent contexts required painstaking long-term commitment, and their feature-length documentary *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2008)¹³ would have showcased a family of travellers settled in County Durham – exemplifying Amber’s attempted integration of life, work and friendship – but then changed course to commemorate the sudden death in 2007 of founder-member Murray Martin.

The preservation for posterity of visual records of endangered forms of working life now well-established, one impetus towards making full-length fictional features was that narrative structure and film editing facilitate greater attention to social dynamics among their subjects rather than just objectively placed physical routines. Also, significant changes in the film-making funding environment entailed the recently unveiled Channel 4 offering revenue support to regional film workshops – facilitated by an ACTT union deal Amber helped broker – and its commissioners were especially keen to screen new drama. So material documenting a travellers camp gathering waste coal on a Northumbrian tideline was opportunistically bolted onto a bare biographical storyline in 1985’s *Seacoal*. This was followed four years later by *In Fading Light*’s more conventionally cast and fully-scripted story of small-scale fisheries sailing from North Shields, this time widening the ambit to knit together social intercourse among the trawlers at sea with their home lives. Completing this more traditionally observational strand, *Eden Valley* (1994) described the precarious existence of a County Durham horse trainer in a haunting study of harsh landscape and natural rhythm passing through a minimal father-son narrative arc.

Sensitively detailed and lyrically realised though these films are in chronicling tenuous patterns of making ends meet, a sense of overdetermination is palpable – in the physical rigour of the activities involved and being circumscribed by arbitrary external forces and interests. Only the insertion of gender and generational texture provides lines of flux to complicate and defy otherwise resolutely static, backward-looking portrayals. Of course, Amber’s photographic and documentary film practice had



always paid attention to the social networks and community activities they observed around them – even if hitherto brought together only rather uneasily with the over-riding focus on labour under the banner of working-class culture. But now – again partly due to circumstance – fictional explorations of the impact of economic adversity on family and community cohesion assumed centre-stage, with the specificities of subsistence modes increasingly framed with merely a contributory, if still baleful, role in ensembles of social reproduction. This cycle started with *Dream On* (1991) following a group of women on a North Shields sink estate finding renewed strength in mutual support, mobilising the cathartic potential of shared fears and fantasies to overcome personal and collective trauma.

Perhaps predictably, this film risked romanticising the magical resilience of women’s social labour counterposed to the pathos of men’s lost breadwinning grandeur – a schematic segregation partly mitigated by adroit comic and carnivalesque elements (and painfully wooden dream sequences). In the subsequent East Durham trilogy the temptations of wishful thinking are resisted by hinging narrative poignancy on the conflictual ambivalence of family and friendship ties in a local community wrecked by the withdrawal of its economic bedrock. Emerging from Amber’s long-term ‘Coalfield Stories’ accumulating images, stories and ideas from residents in and around the Easington area (where *Eden Valley* was also set), these organically connected films represent alternate perspectives on the same situation. *The Scar* (1997) centres on a former activist in the Women Against Pit Closures group – as elsewhere, crucial to nourishing the miners’ local base and propagandising further afield. Her family left broken and bereft after the strike’s defeat, an appetite for life is revived by an affair with the manager of the private opencast which replaced the deep mine (providing a small fraction of its jobs), but she’s unable to stomach the selfish consumerism and antisocial isolation of the future she foresees – and neither can he then accept the cynical corporate agenda he’s asked to serve.

Though tantalising viewers with the prospect of oversimplistic romantic closure, *The Scar* refuses *Dream On*’s arguably ‘easy’ options. Like *Father* (2001) further muddies waters by juggling the contrasting predicaments of three generations of a single family. The grandfather holds onto his beloved pigeon loft earmarked for compulsory demolition for leisure sector development, while his estranged son – also a former miner – juggles self-exploitation teaching and composing music but lacks the resources to sustain his marriage. He might carve out breathing space with a local council contract – but only by persuading the old man to cave in. Meanwhile his young son grapples with late childhood’s gamut of dilemmas, but even without Attention Deficit would struggle to glimpse coherent guidance on how to grow

from the role-model muddle around him. But as separately tortured trajectories intersect, private pain, anger and confusion are woven back into mutual concern, averting irreversibly violent resolution. And, though less straightforwardly than in *The Scar*, the tentative outcome again revolves around attitudes converging, refusing to concede their futures to external institutional agendas whose exploitative corporate whims are felt as personal insults on top of earlier grievous injury.

Like Father also marked a decisive departure in casting non-actors in all the leading roles whose own life-histories closely paralleled their characters, producing convincing acting and boosting the denouement’s credibility. *Shooting Magpies* (2005) trumped this innovation by additionally translating the real-life relationship between the two main actors into the plot – even including their testimony direct to camera – examining the most depressed neighbourhoods where drug addiction’s ramifications ripple out, colliding with other survival strategies and raising questions of collective and individual obligation. A young mother strives one last time to help wean her partner off heroin with the help of a friend who is himself a single father shielding his son from delinquency. But his altruistic motives prompt lapses of judgement which could prove suicidal – metaphorically in terms of local respect, and physically in an environment where summary justice accompanies slights real or imagined. While she finally admits defeat, and manages to move on, his fate is left hanging – and the harsher brightness of the digital video filming accentuates the unpromising choices available in a story where, for every advance for one character, another’s downfall beckons. Yet, despite tragedy looming on all sides, generosity, tenderness and goodwill persist in generating the possibility of avoiding surrender to the war of all against all.

Amber Valence

What distinguishes Amber’s cinematic practice from conventional social-realism is scrupulous engagement with their subjects to generate content and texture, rather than parachuting in to exploit indigenous resources for externally pre-defined purposes. Relationships are built after approaching a community and offering their craft skills, subsequently drawing on those found and their surrounding cultural patterns. From images, interactions and interviews collected, stories lending themselves to dramatic treatment develop in active collaboration with local people whose feedback reinforces authenticity measured by their responses. However, despite following the axiom that artists should bracket their own concerns to reveal those of the community in which they work¹⁴, Amber’s films demonstrate two related sets of contradictions. These concern the material grounds upon which they enter the lives of target networks – exactly how outsiders become insiders – and the interpersonal co-ordinates within which film narratives then emerge. But while compromising the transparency of the final output in both its social and realist dimensions, these problematics also help explain the genre’s – and Amber’s – continuing powerful fertility as well as illustrating its inherent political ambivalence.

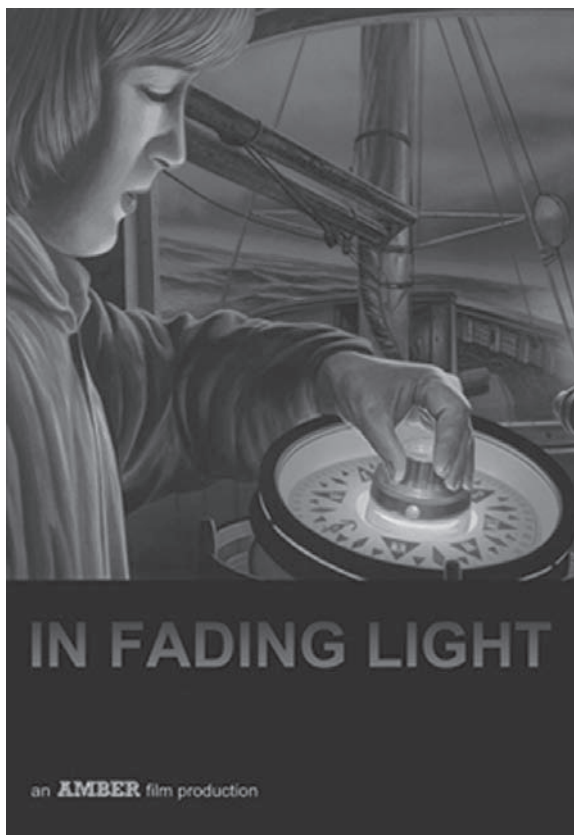
Alienated from traditional proletarian backgrounds after bourgeois betterment via higher education, reconnection has in effect been sought with the lost social anchorings of group members’ own family and class heritage. An ensuing celebratory nostalgia projectively identifies with ‘organic’ settings where apparently objective, culturally-fused reflections of economic and geographic conditions nevertheless eternally melt into air in the march of ‘progress’. Furthermore the bulk of the contemporary lower-classes are left behind in favouring marginal milieux less afflicted by contemporary respectability and consumerism – but here the confusing multi-hybridity of class and cultural influences already saturating the film-makers’ biography can also be more readily disavowed. Yet their relatively privileged modern lifestyle choices are mystified within the plots into the arbitrary exigencies of necessity confounding



passionate relations between characters – whose ‘natural’ discovery of new environments is the fictional alibi for poring over them¹⁵. To varying degrees, therefore, the dynamics behind the film narratives are driven as much by resonances with the artists’ personal issues as the real situations of those depicted – and, as righteous criticisms of documentary method and ethnographic bias emphasise, the credibility of observational detachment is inexorably undermined by such compelling hidden agendas.

Just as inevitably, the economic underpinnings and corollaries of the films’ development and production are also disguised in their manifest content. For example, the group’s approach has usually entailed direct financial intervention to buy physical infrastructure¹⁶. Seen as supplementary ‘tools of the trade’ this certainly reinforces their credible seriousness, but also sets precedents of inequitable patronage in dealings with locals lacking the wherewithal to solve problems this way. Indeed, questions of property ownership in the narratives usually represent agonising all-or-nothing life-changing decisions rather than strategic investment options – while characters representing big money and associated power tend to be our heroes’ unequivocal nemeses. Similarly, the funding for community photography or other documentary projects – whose output later feeds into the films – often originates in local government or other insitutional remits. This implicates the film-makers in hierarchical circuits of influence which again militate against the clarity of horizontal mutual exchanges among equals, and further implies selective local engagement with those individuals more amenable to such external pressures or able to realistically afford public exposure and official oversight.

All these inconveniences corrupt the impossible humble humanism of Amber’s ideals, leaving the results open to the weighty objections levelled at documentary genres and realism in general and social-realist cinema in particular. But the shortcomings cited here could never begin to be tackled in mainstream cinematic apparatuses – since storylines, settings, characters, scripts and outcomes are fixed so long in advance according to the supposed superior wisdom (or stupidity) of their vanguards of production variously incorporating discourses of power and the bottom lines of capital. Little more than duplicitous lip-service is typically paid to any deeper correspondence with lower-class experience, whereas Amber’s wilful autonomy and extreme care and patience bring such issues to the surface. In a sense, the process they embark on in their artistic sphere to get each low-budget film made mirrors, however inadvertently and partially, the conjunctures routinely faced by social strata who lack the clout to assert their own interests – requiring the mobilisation of the fullest range of resources available, however tainted, to prise as much personal and communal benefit and meaning as possible from conditions imposed from outside. So the real secret of Amber’s success may lie squarely in their collective ethos, putting their own integrity genuinely on the line to nurture and maintain intimate intercourse with others and to share the results. As Murray Martin’s motto – the informal manifesto of the whole group – has it: “Integrate life and work and friendship. Don’t tie yourself to institutions. Live cheaply and you’ll remain free. And, then, do whatever it is that gets you up in the morning”.



www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Notes

- Whose more forward-looking manifestations include an engagement with last year’s Climate Camp and subsequent debate: see John Cunningham, ‘A Climatic Disorder?’ [review of] ‘Class, Climate Change and Clean Coal – the Climate Campers and the Unions’ conference, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1 November 2008’ (www.metamute.org). Also commemorating the 1984-5 strike is a ‘Working Class Bookfair’ organised by Tyneside IWW and others to be held at the Linskill Centre, Linskill Terrace, North Shields, Tyne & Wear, 14th March, 11am-4pm. Involved in both initiatives is Dave Douglass, former NUM branch official, whose *Pit Sense Versus the State* (Phoenix Press, 1994) is one of the most clear-sighted explanations of the miners’ radicalism.
- A feature-length television documentary directed by Mike Figgis about the event was broadcast on Channel 4 on 20th October 2002. Deller’s own catalogue of the work was published by commissioners Artangel in *The English Civil War Part II: Personal Accounts of the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike* (ed. G. Van Noord); see also a comprehensive discussion by Alice Correia in ‘Interpreting Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave*’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp.93-112, 2006. For blunt firsthand analyses of the strike’s policing and media coverage, see Dave Douglass, *Come and Wet This Truncheon and Tell Us Lies About the Miners*, ASP/DAM, 1986. And for a powerful relevant literary fictionalisation, see David Peace’s GB84 (Faber 2004) – whose previous bitter ‘Yorkshire noir’ cycle is adapted for television in Channel 4’s *Red Riding* trilogy this month.
- For an interesting comparison in the field of social documentary photography, see Darren Newbury, ‘Telling Stories About Photography: The Language and Imagery of Class in the Work of Humphrey Spender and Paul Reas’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.69-88, 2001. For an exhaustive treatment of documentary photography, see John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday*, Manchester University Press, 1998.
- A useful historical summary up to the 1990s can be found in Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit*, Wallflower, 2002.
- Cf. John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, BFI, 1986.
- See Roger Bromley, ‘The Theme That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Class and Recent British Film’, in Sally R. Munt (ed.), *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change*, Cassell, 2000.
- In ‘Reimagining the Working Class: From *Riff-Raff* To *Nil By Mouth*’ (in Sheila Rowbotham & Huw Beynon, eds., *Looking At Class*, Rivers Oram Press, 2001), Kerry William Purcell considers the films alongside contemporary visualisations of social class in the photography of Paul Graham and Nick Waplington; whereas Glenn Creeber’s “‘Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man”: Social Class and the Female Voice in *Nil By Mouth*’ (in Munt, note 6) interprets its erosion of male perspective in terms of previous social-realist cinema.
- Jill Marshall also discusses shifting gender relations after deindustrialisation in ‘Going For the *Full Monty*: Comedy, Gender and Power’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.31-48, 2000.
- For example, Carine Adler, Pawel Pawlikowski, Lynne Ramsay, Shane Meadows, Penny Woolcock, Kenny Glenaan and Andrea Arnold, among others.
- Such cinematic contrasts of violence and conviviality are recurring globally, with rich parochial inflections in France (e.g. Guédiguian, Kechiche), Belgium (Dardenne brothers) and Romania; in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico and even further North (John Sayles).
- Including dramatised sequences within investigative documentary, as with 1960s de facto Newcastle mayor orchestrating his rotten borough in *T. Dan Smith* (1987). For levels of resonance achieved, see, for example, founder-member Sirkka-Lisa Kontinen’s tapestries of public communal cement – in Byker’s (1983) pre-slum-clearance back-to-backs, *Step By Step*’s (1985) North Shields dance school, and *The Writing In The Sand*’s (1991) windswept Northumbrian beach playgrounds.
- Setting up a Current Affairs Unit to co-ordinate work for the NUM and the strike’s public face. Previous campaign work had included preserving part of Newcastle’s historic Quayside (where their operations are based), and earlier solidarity at Vickers Armstrong in Scotswood at the request of the stewards’ convenor there. Protracted later involvement with an ex-mining community also yielded, among other things, the recent fiction films.
- Which received a television premiere on Channel 4’s More4, 10th December 2008. Full details and summaries of Amber/Side projects, exhibitions, photographic resources and film productions, including VHS, DVD and print publications, can be found at www.amber-online.com. Interviews with Amber members giving insights into their intentions and motivations can be found in *The Pursuit of Happiness* and also in: Huw Beynon, ‘Documentary Poet’ [interview with Murray Martin], in Rowbotham & Beynon, *Looking At Class* (see note 7); Neil Young, ‘Forever Amber: An Interview With Ellin Hare and Murray Martin of Amber Collective’, *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp.61-80, 2001; Darren Newbury, ‘Documentary Practices and Working-class Culture: An Interview With Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)’, *Visual Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.113-128, 2002; and Jack Newsinger, ‘Together We Stand’ [interview with Graeme Rigby], *Vertigo* magazine, No. 11, August 2007.
- Inspired by R.G. Collingwood’s liberal-humanist idealist philosophy in *The Principles of Art*, 1938.
- As a desperate housewife flees spousal abuse to Lynemouth (*Seacoal*); a daughter mends fences with her ship’s captain father (*In Fading Light*), or an Irish wise-woman doesn’t with her publican son (*Dream On*); a juvenile delinquent seeks sanctuary with his absent dad (*Eden Valley*); a working-class lad made good fails as management material (*The Scar*); a self-employed community worker juggles family and career (*Like Father*); and an ex-youth worker mentors others but risks losing himself (*Shooting Magpies*).
- Such as purchasing a caravan and horse in Northumberland; then a trawler and pub (both fully-functioning) in North Tyneside; and then acres of land, more horses and buildings in East Durham.

The Toughest Man in Cairo vs The Zionist Vegetable

Anand Balakrishnan

According to my old neighbor, Kamal Hanafi, the vegetables in Israel are huge and good for only one thing. “The cucumbers,” he exclaimed, eyes lighting up, “are this long”—he stretched his hands more than a foot apart. “They are this wide”—he made a circle with his two hands. “And they taste like shit, all chemicals and unnatural fertilizers.” He spat. “No one can eat vegetables that disgusting. The only people who use them are the women, who sit like this”—he spread his legs to demonstrate. “And the men, of course.” The invisible cucumber in his hands jabbed sharply up. “And now they’re sending their vegetables to Egypt to fuck us all.”

Kamal could see it. A flood of Israeli vegetables, inundating the Egyptian market, washing away the old dream of agricultural self-sufficiency. More pernicious still: the image of oversized Zionist produce coming for his two young daughters. Kamal was very concerned with what his children put in their mouths. “It is difficult to keep them pure,” he complained, before listing the few shops that still sold untainted greens from *Umm Al’Dunya*.

But it wasn’t just the vegetables. In the years since Sadat’s policy of *infitah* liberalized the Egyptian economy, delectable imports have come dancing through the open door to tempt the girls of Egypt. It began with foreign banks, foreign aid, and joint ventures with Xerox, Colgate-Palmolive, and Ford; and it culminated in a torrent of chocolates from Hershey’s and Nestl?, as well as Dove Bars, Lay’s potato chips, Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, acidwash jeans, waffles, bikinis, rap music, exercise videos, Britney Spears, and lesbianism.

If he had a son, things would be easier. But Kamal has not been so lucky. He’s been trying to have a son for years. He tries every night, he told me, but all his wife has given him are girls he will lose one day to a wet t-shirt contest and the all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet in Sharm el Sheikh.

My friendship with the Hanafi family was my proudest accomplishment in Cairo. Kamal, his wife, and his two daughters lived just down the hall in my building, a notso- solidly middle-class apartment complex in Sayyida Zeinab. Kamal was an old friend of my Arabic teacher and, soon after I moved in, I began an aggressive charm offensive. In the afternoons, I came back from my job editing English translations and stopped by their apartment for tea, practicing my Arabic with Kamal while the two girls practiced their English with me. I made a point of bringing them tasteful and conservative gifts (Egyptian-made, of course). Colored pencils, expensive stationary, pale white dolls with long, knotty hair and ugly lace dresses. I sat with Kamal day after day and held my chin thoughtfully through long lectures on the dangers of foreign involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. One day, after polishing off a plate of kunaffa, I criticized the idea of US intervention in Darfur.

“It is an Arab problem,” I said. “And the Arab League can solve it. The United States is treating Sudan like Iraq—a staging ground for imperial expansion.”

Kamal nodded, gazing approvingly at me through his large square bifocals. From then on, he had his daughters refer to me as “Uncle.” I had succeeded. I had friends.

My conquest was not complete, however. I could not, and never would, win over Kamal’s wife. Rania taught literature in an adjunct capacity at one of the universities in town. I would ask her about Arabic literature and poetry, about her classes, her family, politics, movies— she was never anything but cordial, but there was something about the perfunctory way she answered my questions that

made me think she was wary of my presence.

She had cause to be wary. Soon after he declared me an honorary Arab, Kamal embarked on a courtship of his own. It began with a series of quiet taps on my door. It must have been sometime after two in the morning, and I was lying in bed, neither awake nor asleep, paralyzed by the heat and a nameless anxiety. The taps sounded like Morse code. An SOS? I tiptoed to the door and looked through the peephole. I saw Kamal’s face, stretched and distorted, peering back at me. I opened the door. Kamal was wearing his pajamas. He was barefoot. And he was holding a trembling pack of Cleopatra Superlux—super, because they came in an extra-wide hard pack; lux, because they were extra-long.

I asked him if something was wrong.

He shook his head, no.

I asked him if he wanted to come in.

He did.

He showed himself to my couch and sat down, placing the pack of cigarettes on the coffee table. He had something to ask me, he said, and he didn’t want me to take it the wrong way.

He wanted me to blow smoke in his face.

I looked at the cigarettes and hesitated. It was an odd request. I didn’t smoke. Even in Cairo, where everybody smoked, I had only ever gone in for melon-flavored shisha, and even then I hadn’t really inhaled, secreting the perfumed smoke in my cheek.

I explained this to him, slightly chagrined.

Ah, but he wasn’t asking me to smoke! He used to smoke two packs a day, he said, back before he got married. His wife had made him promise to quit, and he had. But he still liked the smell, and I wouldn’t have to inhale. He looked very innocent on the couch, with his thick bifocals and his pajamas and his black dress socks, and I didn’t mind the smell of smoke, either, so I agreed.

I sat on the couch with Kamal and tore the plastic off the cigarette pack. The couch was a gift from my boss, an ancient, leonine woman who had grown up in the days of King Farouk, drank gin straight, and muttered angrily under her breath at the sight of muhajibahs.

She must have been very fashionable in her twenties, which was when she bought the couch. It was faux- French, with dark green fabric in a paisley pattern. There were cherubic faces on the wooden backrest, carved in bas-relief, blowing

“Get it get it, get it get it
(WHOOOA)

Get it get it, get it get it
(WHOOOOOA)

(Do you like it)

Get it get it, get it get it
(OOOHHHH)

(This feels good)”

**Britney Spears,
‘I’m a Slave 4 U’**

“Messenger of fear in sight
Dark deception kills the light
Hybrid children watch the sea
Pray for father, roaming free”

**Metallica,
‘The Thing That Should Not Be’**

whorls of wind from pursed lips.

Over the decades, a rusty spring had cut its way through the center of the couch. Six inches of jagged metal wobbled between Kamal and me. I’ve never been very good with matches, I’m afraid, and I had trouble lighting the cigarette. Each failed attempt added to a small mountain of matches on the table and a stench of sulfur in the air.

Finally, it caught. The cigarette flared as the paper started to burn, and I carefully drew a cloud of smoke into my mouth. I held my breath and leaned in, over the paisley print and the exposed spring, within inches of Kamal’s expectant face. He had removed his glasses for the occasion. I could see the pores on his skin, the light razor burn on his left cheek, the mustard-colored stains on his incisors, a testament to years of heavy smoking and poor oral hygiene. I thought he would close his eyes, or at least look away, but he stared right at me: I noticed for the first time that his light brown irises were speckled with flecks of gold. Then I exhaled, releasing a stream of smoke that traveled in a long, unbroken line before curling up into his nostrils. The scent of his cologne mixed with the bitterness of the tobacco. Kamal threw his head back, his eyelids fluttered, his upper lip quivered, and his cheeks hollowed as he sucked away in my direction.

Somehow I had not noticed the awkwardness of the whole scene until that very moment. I busied myself with the cigarette and the ashtray in an attempt to hide the mixture of embarrassment and amusement I felt at Kamal’s evident pleasure.

After I’d stubbed out what remained of the cigarette, Kamal relaxed into the couch. He spoke wistfully about his life before Rania, when he’d spent nearly all his time chain-smoking with his old friend Wagdi Lewis. If smoke represented freedom, Wagdi and Kamal had spent the 1980s liberating Egypt. Kamal chuckled as he described the quantities of tobacco they burned—fields of tobacco as wide as the Sahara and as tall as the pyramids.

It wasn’t just cigarettes, though. There were modest amounts of alcohol, as well, and some (wink wink) hashish. And there were politics. Wagdi was a secular leftist, and so deeply principled as to exert a gravitational force on those around him. He easily indoctrinated Kamal, who recounted with pride tales of Wagdi’s struggle with the corrupt Egyptian government and its foreign backers. Unlike Kamal, who retreated into a stultifying world of domesticity, Wagdi remained politically engaged. Even after starting a family, he had spent five years in prison for attempting to stockpile explosives. Wagdi had changed in only one way: he’d quit smoking. Not because anyone told him to, but because even homegrown Cleopatras were no longer 100 percent Egyptian.

In Kamal’s Egypt there were four types of men. There were the men over fifty, who were castrated by the events of 1967, and those under thirty, who suckled on the weak milk of Lebanese music videos; between them was Kamal’s own generation, men who had seceded from society to create inviolable nation-states of their families. And then there was Wagdi, a category unto himself, the toughest man in Cairo, a superman who did not know the meaning of the word “defeat.”

The night ended as abruptly as it began. Kamal issued a brief but vitriolic attack on USAID. He made fun of my sneakers. He looked around the living room of my apartment and told me I needed a woman to take care of me. Then he stood up, thanked me for my hospitality, and tiptoed down

the hallway to his wife and daughters.

Our secret relationship went on like this for months—the nocturnal visitations, the secondhand smoke, the stories about Wagdi. Every few days at one or another inappropriate hour, Kamal would knock softly but insistently until I woke up and let him in. Sometimes I tried to stay up to wait for him, but his comings were unpredictable. He would probably have come every night if he could have, but he had a whole series of deliberate precautions, designed to hide his perfidy from his family, and after a while I just accepted it. I still stopped by Kamal's apartment after work sometimes, but less than before; I resented the pretense, the highly mannered welcome Rania gave me when I came in, the hungry look in Kamal's eyes when I left.

One afternoon I stopped by the Hanafis to drop off a plate of sweets my coworker had given me; it was more than I could eat myself. The door was open, and I stood at the entrance for a moment without announcing myself. Kamal and Rania were having an argument. She wasn't blind to Kamal's indiscretions.

"Admit it," I heard her saying. "You've been smoking again. I can tell. You go out at all hours of morning and then come sneaking home, washing your hair in the dark.

"It's the foreigner who smokes," Kamal said. His voice sounded desperate. "He is Hindu, from America. They have terrible habits." And then, self-righteously, "I have never smoked."

"This is just like the Wagdi situation. Your friends are a terrible influence on you."

"But I stopped seeing Wagdi..."

"And you will stop seeing this man, too."

"But he is a foreigner! He has no family, no friends."

"He is not to come into our house."

"Darling, don't do this," Kamal pleaded. I couldn't take it anymore. I left the sweets by the door and crept away, feeling sick to my stomach.

I was the bad influence? Two months into our relationship, I'd become an addict. I had begun to smoke on my own, squirreling away a pack of Marlboro Reds in my bedroom where Kamal wouldn't find them. I had started inhaling. And I... well, I didn't have many friends, actually, but I didn't need to hear about it from Kamal, and I certainly didn't need his pity.

A week later I heard the familiar tap-tap-tap on my door. I lay in bed, ignoring it, hoping he would go away. But he kept drumming his fingers, and despite myself I let him in and once more acted out the ritual. Looking nervous, he asked where I'd been, why I hadn't come by his apartment. I told him I'd been busy. I couldn't bring myself to tell him I'd overheard their conversation, and he couldn't bring himself to tell me not to come by. We had achieved a kind of equilibrium. I mostly stopped listening to the stories he told, chain-smoking the time away till he was done. His visits became less frequent—his precautions had become still more elaborate, I guess.

One night Kamal appeared at my door in a state of extraordinary agitation. I was already smoking; in fact, I was marinating in smoke.

He sat down next to me. "My wife is leaving tomorrow," he said. She was going to Beni Suef, to visit her family. "Freedom," he sighed. Then he leaned across the metal spring and put his hand on my arm. "I need your help," he said, his voice dropping conspiratorially.

"Sure," I responded. I was mesmerized by the smoke's languorous ascent through the air to my ceiling. My dignity and I had parted ways some time ago. I probably would have agreed to anything.

He had made plans to see his old friend Wagdi. The toughest man in Cairo, remember? I nodded. It was to be a reunion of sorts. He wished I could meet him, he said, but it was not in my destiny; I had my own, very important, role to play. He needed me to watch his daughters while he was out.

I saw it all in my mind right then, the whole arc of our relationship: my courtship of Kamal and his family, Kamal's courtship of me. Kamal's betrayal

of me. And now, suddenly, my betrayal of Kamal. My hand shook. "They can stay in my apartment," I promised, hoping my voice did not betray my excitement. "It will give me great pleasure to welcome your daughters," I said, in exceedingly formal Arabic.

When he left, I lay in bed, sweating through my sheets. It was a hot night, and it was almost impossible to sleep. I lit cigarette after cigarette and stared at the light cast on my ceiling by the street lamps outside. I woke up covered in ash.

My recollection of the next day is hazy, filtered as it is through my guilty conscience. I remember running to the corner store and the look on the cashier's face at the sum I spent. I remember slowing my sprint to a walk when I passed a security officer, as though he could see my intentions or, worse, what was in the bags I was carrying. I remember closing my curtains because the sunlight hurt my eyes. And I remember hearing Kamal's familiar knock at an unfamiliar time of day. He stood in the hallway, dressed in a suit, with his hands on his daughters' heads.

"Good morning," he said, beaming.

The girls must have sensed something was wrong. They looked into my dark, drab apartment with trepidation. Kamal was oblivious. "Go on, my ladies. Uncle will take care of you today." He noticed the cigarette in my fingers and said something vaguely disapproving, but he hurried away with a wave before I could respond. The girls filed in, reluctantly.

I should say that my intentions were not evil. I did not intend to hurt the girls. They were merely pawns in a game their father had set in motion. I swallowed hard. Sit down over there, I said, gesturing toward the couch with my cigarette hand. I told them not to be frightened, that we were going to have a special English lesson, that we were going to have a good time together. Ash fell on the floor as I spoke, my hands moving dramatically with my words. We're going to play now, I said, smiling.

I was calm at the time, but in retrospect I must have seemed kind of crazy. I was dimly aware of how things must have looked through their eyes: the precipitous ceiling fan and the bare light bulb, the couch with its rusty spring, the bizarre cherub carvings, the spinning shadows. I saw myself: wild-



eyed and disheveled, shouting things in English, waving my arms in the air while holding a lit cigarette. The older girl, Reem, held a protective arm around her sister Haneen, who looked like she was about to cry. I wanted to stop—honestly, I did—but I couldn't. Their fear made me feel crazier. Is this what it feels like to be dangerous, I wondered? Well, then, I was dangerous. I was Dracula, bizarrely accented creature of shadow. I was Shaitan, my apartment a trap for the unwary. I was Hindu, my gods many and many-armed, my habits terrible. I was the darkness, the ugliest American, the lord of imports. I was the terrible Zionist vegetable.

My glasses slipped down my nose. I pushed them back up with a talon.

I'll be right back, I said. Don't move! The girls looked at each other in fear. I returned with the plastic bags from the corner store and placed them on the coffee table. "What's in the bags?" I asked them in English. They didn't respond. "What do you think is in the bags?" I asked again, in Arabic this time, pointing at one especially bulky bag. Nothing. I cleared my throat and was all set to ask them again when I realized that with each question, spittle was leaking from the corners of my mouth. I was foaming. The girls were trembling. This had to stop. I had to stop it. So I jumped up, took hold of the bulkiest bag and turned it upside down. Suddenly, the table was covered in... chocolatescandies cookiescrackerschipssiccream-deliciousness!

MERRY CHRISTMAS, I bellowed in English. The girls were in shock. MERRY CHRISTMAS, I shouted again. Reem stopped crying and Haneen looked slightly less anxious. I yelled again, louder this time: MERRY CHRISTMAS! I pulled open a box of Raisinets and threw them in the air, laughing as the American chocolate rained down upon us. MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

Amazingly, all of the tension disappeared. Reem replied "Merry Christmas" rather matter-of-factly

Photography,
Adrian Gaut;
Art Direction,
Babak Radboy

and smiled, and Haneen rolled her eyes. Pretty soon we were all sitting on the floor, tearing open candy wrappers and eating bite-size Snickers bars. I taught them to say “candy bar” and “ice cream” and “whatchamacallit.” After a little while they asked if we could have music, and the girls went through my MP3s. They jumped around the tiny room, mouthing the sounds to Britney Spears songs. I helped them. It was a fine English lesson. Then they developed a synchronized dance for “I’m a Slave 4 U,” spinning until they fell giggling and flailing into twin nests of discarded candy wrappers.

“Get it get it get it get!” they laughed. I started to feel self-conscious. “Maybe we should be quieter,” I said. Reem smiled a gigantic smile. “I mean it. Let’s make this our secret, OK? We should be careful.”

“Aiwa!” They agreed. “Secret!” But we weren’t careful enough. I lost track of time, and when the door to my apartment opened without warning, the girls were spinning madly again, mouths smeared with chocolate and nougat. I was clapping my hands out of time, pausing occasionally to toss candy wrappers in the air like confetti. It took us all a moment to register Kamal’s dark, angry face in the doorway. I tried to sweep the candy wrappers under the cherub couch with my foot. “It’s not what it looks like,” I stammered. “It’s nothing. I was teaching them English.”

Kamal grabbed his daughters by the wrists. “Haram aleik!” he yelled at me. “You have betrayed me!” He turned and slammed the door, leaving me standing alone, Britney Spears still playing on the laptop, a half-eaten Dove Bar melting in my hand.

Kamal never forgave me. And there remained a part of me that wished things had ended on a more graceful note. After our mutual betrayal, our shared hallway continued to reverberate with ill feelings, and at any other time of my life I might have dreaded leaving my apartment on the off-chance I might encounter him or his family. But thanks to Kamal, I was a changed man. I was shameless. I wore shorts in the hallway and t-shirts in the street. I smoked a pack a day. I started drinking. And what’s more, I was obsessed with Wagdi Lewis.

One tale in particular fascinated me. Kamal and I had been driving from the airport to our apartment building. I was returning from a short visit to the United States and had thought it very kind of him to make the hour-long drive on my behalf. When I came out of the terminal, luggage in hand, I looked around to find Kamal standing by his car, a gleam in his eyes and a pack of cigarettes in his hand. He had missed me.

On the drive home, Kamal refused to open a window. I puffed and he vicariously inhaled until I grew dizzy and Kamal, drunk off the smoke, began de-claiming. “The toughest man in Cairo,” he announced, and I knew what was coming. “One time in the 1980s,” Kamal told me as he pulled his rusty Fiat into a gas station, “when Sadat was in power and everyone was being arrested all over again, the police tied Wagdi to a chair and beat him with their fists until the chair broke. Then they took the chair and tore the legs off and beat him with the legs of the chair.” I tried putting the cigarette out in the car’s ashtray. Kamal intercepted it and began waving it up and down in a chopping motion to demonstrate the violence of the torture. “And after they broke the legs of the chair on his body, the police looked down at Wagdi Lewis, lying on the concrete floor of the police station in a pool of blood. There were splinters everywhere. They squatted down and yelled at him. ‘Are you ready to talk?’ they yelled. And you know what happened?” Kamal stopped and stared intently at me, like I was one of the cops. His eyes were wide and distorted behind his thick lenses. “Nothing. Nothing happened. He was asleep. Snoring.” Kamal rolled down the window and tossed the cigarette out onto the ground of the gas

You should meet my son! You remind me of him...

...He is an idiot!

station. I cringed. “Now that’s courage,” he said. Maybe he was right. Maybe that was courage and not just psychological trauma. All I knew now was that I wanted to meet this man who had yawned in the face of torture. I wanted to see just how tough he was, how strict his principles were. If they were anything like Kamal’s, I was pretty sure I could break him.

Finding the toughest man in Cairo was remarkably easy. My Arabic tutor knew him and arranged a meeting: 3:30, Saturday afternoon, Midan Orabi. Deciding what to wear was more difficult. I initially thought about wearing my suit, the same one I’d worn to meet Naguib Mahfouz a month earlier, but thought better of it. A suit was meant to impress, or, at least, to insinuate. I wanted to intimidate. I found my most shameful possession, a shirt so embarrassing I had repressed its existence by wadding it into a ball and burying it in the deepest crevice of my bureau.

The shirt belonged to my father. He’d bought it when he came to visit me, during a trip to the beaches of Dahab, on the Red Sea. I’d lied and told Kamal we were going to Aswan, to see the treasures of ancient Egypt. I knew that if I told him the truth he would scoff. Prostitutes and Israelis, he always said, those were the only things that existed in Dahab. He was wrong: There were shirtless Australians as well, and a class of Egyptian salesman evolved specifically to seduce my father. They called my dad Amitabh Bachchan, and he was flattered; he thanked them in Hindi, and they complimented his Arabic. Within hours of our arrival, my dad, giddy with the attention and the power of the dollar, had bought three t-shirts, two with a camel and a pyramid, and, more humiliatingly, a third emblazoned with an image of the Stella beer label. He wore the shirt for the weekend. He wore it proudly, smiling and waving every time someone would yell “Hey, Mr Stella” as he walked past.

I pulled the t-shirt on and stood in my bathroom in front of the mirror. I rehearsed talking points to my reflection: The war in Iraq, I said, was necessary to disturb the unproductive stasis of Arab politics. I turned so I could look at myself in profile. Opening the Egyptian markets to foreign goods was necessary to shock a stagnant economy into action. I sucked in my stomach. It was Hayek who said it best. Or Milton Friedman. I shrugged. It didn’t matter. Liberal interventionism would trump Oriental despotism.

I was ready. I arrived early for our meeting. Wagdi was two hours late. I waited for him in a coffee shop and got a table in the center, strategically located underneath a ceiling fan and next to a giant plastic bust of Umm Kulthum. Her impressive head gazed impassively at the hordes of teenagers roaming outside. Most of them were playing Amr Diab ringtones on their phones and sweating; others were buying bodybuilding magazines and tabloids with news about Hollywood celebrities from a group of old men who seemed to despise their customers as much as their wares. I had a hard time knowing what Umm Kulthum was thinking. Each lens of her iconic sunglasses was the size of my face. I don’t think she was happy with what she saw.

It was warm in the coffee shop, and I dozed off. A rough hand on my shoulder woke me up. It was Wagdi. His broad, ugly, pockmarked face was inches away from mine. He smiled. “Sleepy Mr Stella,” he said. He roared with laughter.

I looked down at my watch. “I guess I should have assumed,” I said, as coldly as possible, “that everything in this country will be two hours late.”

Wagdi seemed stung by my insult, which boded well for the afternoon ahead. He apologized and promised to make it up to me by giving me a walking tour of Cairo I would never forget.

Outside, Wagdi grabbed a poorly dressed sheb by the shoulder and pointed to a large sweat stain on the man’s underarm. “That’s where we are. And that...” He ran a thick and calloused finger along the man’s sternum, following the outline of his slightly distended belly. “That is the Nile.”

Whatever advantage I might have gained with my putdown was lost in this disturbing geography lesson.

“That makes his stomach Zamalek,” laughed one of the old men who sold newspapers off a mat made of newspapers. Our human map wriggled like a fish caught on a hook.

“We’ll head here first,” Wagdi pointed at a small island of sweat that had accumulated, oddly, below the man’s left nipple. “The Mugamma.”

“So, what’s that, then?” The old news man pointed to the man’s back, soaked with sweat, the sopping, nearly transparent fabric outlined by a thin, white line of salt. I thought it looked like the African continent. Wagdi thought it looked like Israel, which was, after all, behind everything. “We’re not going there,” he laughed. He let the kid go.

Wagdi ploughed his way through the crowded streets of Cairo. I followed in his wake and tried to keep up as people scattered before his intimidating bulk.

As we walked he told me about his life. He was born in Shubra, to a poor Coptic family with too many children; his dad was a butcher; he was precociously literate; he went to Cairo University in the mid 1970s, where he was politicized, secularized, met his first girlfriend, went to his first protest, and got arrested for the first time. His life from that point on followed a dogged pattern: join underground cell, plot era-appropriate destruction. 1977–1980: Assassinate Israeli officials operating in Egypt; 1985–1988: Assassinate Israeli and Saudi officials operating in Egypt; 1993–1996: Assassinate Israeli, Saudi, and American officials operating in Egypt.

He never actually assassinated anyone. He never even got close. He held meetings, penned pamphlets, organized rallies, smuggled weapons, and then, like clockwork, the police would descend, and he was back in prison. When they released him, the cycle began again. It would continue, he said. It was a question of principle.

We stopped in front of the Mugamma. Wagdi put his arm around my shoulder and guided me to the very center of the plaza. Wagdi’s arm was solid. Extremely large. Strangely comforting. In comparison, my own arms felt soft and weak; they dangled uselessly at my sides. I stuck my hands in my pockets, tried not to slouch, and we stood like father and son in front of the Mugamma, our shadows stretching away at an angle towards Sharia Tahrir. “This is the glory of the Egyptian state,” he said. “A thousand bureaucrats trapped in an unassailable fortress.” I waited in silence for Wagdi to continue. I started counting the windows from the topleft of the building, and when I got to one hundred and twenty-four, began to think that Wagdi had nothing left to say. I looked up at him. His body almost eclipsed the afternoon sun; a blinding corona met the edge of his silhouette. Turning back, I blinked at pinpricks of light that danced between the Mugamma and myself.

I tried to make a noise that would express condescension or knowing skepticism. It came out as a croak. He was so large! And as to the corruption of the third-world bureaucracy, Wagdi and I were in agreement. I knew I had to say something. I could show no weakness. For had not TE Lawrence (or was it Thomas Friedman?) taught me that Arabs only respond to ostentatious displays of strength? I tried to rally.

“I think the building looks like it’s reaching out to give us a hug.” The building had two wings that jut out, four window-lengths, on either side. They looked like arms extended in friendship and in love to the traffic of Midan Tahrir.

Wagdi’s face turned hard. “The Mugamma is a fortress. It embraces nothing. It crushes the life out of those who work inside, and of those of us who live and work outside, as well.” The weight of

his arm on my shoulder was heavier now. We began walking down the Corniche. I took the offensive, complaining about the traffic, the dirt, heat, the crowds, the noise, the poverty. “Look at other developing countries,” I instructed Wagdi. “India, South Africa. There is hope for those countries. They have industry, a growing middle class. There is nothing here.” I tugged on my t-shirt. My sweat had made it stick to my skin. Wagdi was quiet. I continued, “National pride means nothing without real economic progress. That progress can only come through liberalizing the economy.”

I looked to see if any of my words had registered with Wagdi. I looked at the scar that extended from just below his right eye to the corner of his mouth. “Mr Stella,” he said, “you should meet my son. You remind me of him. He is an idiot.” He held my hand in his calloused mitt, and as he led me off the Corniche and into the city, I began to wilt.

Wagdi took me to Midan Attaba, where he lived in an apartment on the eighth floor. We went up. His apartment was empty, except for a mewling mass of cats. Wagdi gave me a glass of ice water and directed us all onto the balcony.

Wagdi picked one cat up by the scruff of its neck and trained its eye on the Tiring Building, a decrepit Viennese-designed department store languishing in Midan Attaba. On the top of the building was a sculpture of four Atlases holding up the world. I thought that the Atlases were somewhat ugly, and the globe, disproportionately small. I made one final attempt at critique.

“I don’t understand why it takes four Atlases to do what one Atlas can do anywhere else.”

“It is simple, Mr Stella. The weight of the world is heavier here in Cairo.” And with that, I gave up. The man, like the Mugamma, was a monolith. I was crushed. I squatted and started playing with the cats. Wagdi looked down, pleased to see that we were making friends.

Then a door slammed inside. Startled, I stood to see Wagdi shifting his weight from foot to foot. “My son,” he said. “My son has come home.” The cats were perturbed. They started clambering on one another, as though attempting to form a feline pyramid. Wagdi’s son, a scowling, insouciant fourteen-year-old wearing tight, torn jeans and a black Metallica t-shirt, walked onto the balcony. The cats darted past him into the apartment.

“Dad,” Wagdi’s son yelled. “The cats are inside. How many times do we have to talk about this. The cats live in the street. People live in the apartment.”

Wagdi began apologizing to his son. “Don’t apologize,” the son said, “take the cats downstairs.” Wagdi began apologizing to me. I made what I thought were reassuring gestures with my hands. It was a strange scene. The toughest man in Cairo, pleading with a teenager. Wagdi seemed to feel it, too. He followed the cats, leaving me alone with his son on the balcony.

“God I hate those cats.” He looked me up and down. “Are you American?” he asked, and when I nodded, he began to speak in English.

“What the shit are you talking for to my dad?” I smiled.

“He is a motherfucker. I hate him.” He produced a pipe and a crumpled cigarette out of a pocket. “Like Sherlock Holmes,” he said. He pronounced the L in Holmes. He broke the cigarette in half and poured the tobacco into the bowl of the pipe. He struck a match and almost lit the scraps inside, and then leaned against the wall, sucking on the pipe with exaggerated pleasure. “

Damn, that is smooth.” He passed me the pipe. I played along and sucked air through the pipe. The faint, faraway taste of the tobacco reminded me of a more innocent time, now long past, when I didn’t smoke at all.

After a few seconds, I passed the pipe back to him. It was dark out, a development that clearly irritated him. He grumbled and turned on the light on the balcony. A moth began to attack the light bulb. It was a losing battle, but the moth was tenacious, throwing itself mindlessly against the glass again and again. The fluttering shadow cast by the moth just made Wagdi’s son angrier.

I was foaming! The girls were trembling! This had to stop... I had to stop it!

“That moth is stupid,” he complained. “Egypt is shit,” he said. He pointed the stem of the pipe at the Tiring Building. “That is shit.” He pointed at the green lights of the mosques in the distance. “Religion is shit.”

“Religion is shit?” I asked, feeling like I should say something.

“I hate God.”

“You hate God?”

He looked at me meaningfully. “I hate America more than I hate God.”

“You hate America more than you hate God?” I felt stupid repeating his words but I wasn’t quite sure what to say. I was beginning to empathize with the cats. “I hate Britney Spears more than I hate God. But I hate Amr Diab more than I hate Britney Spears.”

“And the cats?”

“Those cats are pimp motherfuckers. I hate my father more than I hate Amr Diab more than I hate Britney Spears more than I hate Egypt more than I hate God.” He looked satisfied with himself, like he had just solved a puzzle. He passed me the pipe, and I obediently took another puff.

“So what do you like?”

He lifted in a fist in the air and made the devil’s horns. “I love metal.” He stuck out his tongue and thrashed his head around. Just as suddenly, he was still. “Stop smoking. The pipe doesn’t work, you asshole.”

Anand Balakrishnan’s ‘The Toughest Man in Cairo vs the Zionist Vegetable’ originally featured in *Bidoun* magazine : Art and Culture from the Middle East. www.bidoun.com



Shoreditch and the creative destruction of the inner city



Benedict Seymour

This article was finished in October 2004 as a kind of complement to a short film called 'The London Particular'. The end of the property bubble and the crisis of the wider system of looting mentioned here have arrived. The interesting question now is whether this crisis will halt, pause or intensify the process of regeneration/gentrification. Is the crisis a reprieve or a new assault, and who will win this time? In Hackney, the east London borough discussed here, there are signs that it is both, with some regeneration projects (mercifully and/or absurdly) stalling, others moving blindly ahead – most notably the 2012 Olympics development. On the estate where I live, plans to construct 'in-fill' housing on green space and 'disused' sites appear to have been held up, and rumours circulate that major projects are being abandoned. What is missing in this text and 'on the ground' is organised resistance to the processes described here, but hopefully this may be about to change now, too...

1 Militant Urbanism

Shoreditch, celebrated as the heart of London's creative and artistic scene in the '90s, is an ex-industrial, increasingly ex-working class area in the East End of London now severely gentrified. Located between the enormous wealth of the financial district in the City of London and the (growing) poverty of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, its flashmob-like explosion into cultural and economic life became the apple of urban policy makers' eyes in the late '90s. Shoreditch's convergence of culture and commerce evolving out of a once lively clubbing, music and (YBA) art scene has today reached a similar condition to that of Berlin Mitte or New York's Lower East side. While the area now hosts bluechip art galleries

formerly based in the West End, the initial 'cultural' elements that gave the area its charisma of community and experiment have mostly been killed off, priced out by rising rents, and supplanted by expensive apartments and culinary distractions – restaurants and bars – that make good the zone's new fashionability.

Effectively looting and recycling devalued property, subcultures, resources and public space for the benefit of an incoming elite, gentrification continues to take place in a remarkably similar form in 'world cities' and provincial capitals across the globe. In areas like Shoreditch and its peers around the globe, the cosmetic renewal of a portion of the crumbling urban core coincides with continued – or intensified – infrastructural decline. The reactivation of dormant (or low profit sweatshop-occupied) industrial properties first as artist's spaces and later as bars, boutiques, apartments etc has made many landlords even richer, but the area's large tracts of public housing, services and transport facilities remain in a deteriorating condition and/or are sold off to the private sector. Gentrification takes from the poor and gives to the rich. Anything residually 'public' will either be reclaimed for the middle class or left to rot.¹

Each wave of colonisers plays out the contradictions of their particular claim to space, taking sides against the next phase of gentrification in which they nevertheless conspire. The nightclub owners print huge posters declaring the area a 'nighttime economy' and warning potential residents not to expect 'living on the edge' to take place in silence. Hipsters in Brooklyn wear 'Defend Williamsburg' t-shirts, a slogan accompanied by a picture of an AK47 and no consciousness whatsoever of the violence of primitive accumulation in which they are always already mired up to their armpits. Acting out fantasies of radical chic and social toxicity, the shocktroops of gentrification have been much taken, in the last ten years, with images of guerilla warfare, an unconscious, aristocratic reflection of concurrent neoliberal 'military urbanism' in more intensively looted cities from Palestine to Iraq to Haiti. Gentrification's vanguard are at their most depoliticised when at their most radically chic (what Simon Pope described in the late '90s as the Prada Meinhof), and almost seems to dream the preconditions for this low-level urban civil war through their hypertrophied 'fashion sense'.

The creation and rapid extinction of cultural 'incubators' – clubs, art spaces, etc. – by more lucrative investments in areas like Shoreditch

at the same time intensifies bohemian settler's efforts to maintain that crucial 'edginess' which is the USP of the area's marketing. In reaction to the zone's loss of 'authenticity' as their punky simulacrum are displaced by more economically efficient ones, Hoxton and Shoreditch, like Williamsburg and the LES, have taken a 'dirty' turn in the last couple of years, playing out a fad of stylised abjection and anarchy while keeping their iPods clean. One physical emblem of this compromise formation is the Shoreditch bar Jaguar Shoes, where the seedy old shopfront has been left intact in all its fading plastic glory, its interior scooped out and embroidered with belle-lettristic graffiti. A shift from the gleaming sterile bars of the dotcom era to red-lit pseudo sleaze today obeys the same relentless logic. A facsimile of bygone bohemian squalor it is at the same time an index of the limited economic resources for renewal, a sign of straitened circumstances. As the (unwitting) poet of gentrification Michel De Certeau might say, the current avant garde of gentrifiers elaborate a sensibility based not on remaking but on 'making do'.

Gentrification in London, a city now rated among the most expensive in the world, embodies the drive of a cannibalistic capitalism looking for ways to cut its costs in a period of declining profit rates and deepening national current account deficits: The search for new, cheaper use values (primarily space, but also intangible assets – authenticity, creativity, community) occurs via the alienating logic of exchange value and its necessary supplement, primitive accumulation (or, simply, theft). Out of the middle classes' need for more room, more time, more congenial cities, emerges simulation, homogenisation, privatisation and the looting of residual commons. An inherently vampiric process which parasitises upon and kills its host, gentrification is a physical symptom of neoliberal economics just as much as generic malls and big box out of town developments are. Where these extrapolate out from modernist industrial economies of scale, gentrification (at first) provides a luxury complement to /compensation for the devastation. Lively, characterful inner city oases, what a relief. The problem is that, as an equally privatised form of development, gentrification is of course only the inner city version of the same process and leads from exclusive art parties to Starbucks and all the rest. The same economic laws force once 'idiosyncratic' zones of experimentation and 'independent shops' into increasing conformity as the process matures and prices rise. There is

Each wave of colonisers plays out the contradictions of their particular claim to space, taking sides against the next phase of gentrification in which they nevertheless conspire

prosperity for a few but for everyone else the area's social capital has been bled dry.

Gentrification does not produce so much as reproduce, rather than creating anew it recycles, instead of investing in production it expropriates objects and subjects outside the 'real economy' to prop up the ever expanding bubble of credit substituting for real growth. As America's balance of payments deficit deepens the property boom in both the US and UK functions to defer the evil moment when this deficit has to be repaid. Without going into this in depth, it should be emphasised that gentrification is very much a sign of western capitalism's diminishing ability to make productive investments. Instead of investing in manufactured and traded goods, the US and UK use other countries money to borrow against over-valued property which in turn allows them to buy more foreign made goods, causing yet more money to be poured back into over-valued real estate. The current account deficit continues to grow. While factories and apartment blocks' rents rise and housing prices rocket, their physical structure is allowed to deteriorate. Some fixed capital is renewed – hence the 'vibrant' look of gentrified zones which one hears so much about – but even this is cosmetic and, as it were, borrowed against the looting of infrastructure and labour both within the nation-state and overseas.

Consumer activity in the UK is dependent as never before on credit secured against mortgages on over-valued property. But the property bubble itself has to be sustained somehow. In this way the local process of gentrification is supported by the extraction of surplus value from the less 'developed' world. In the end the military urbanism going on in Palestine and Fallujah is the extension of the US's monetary imperialism of which gentrification is one domestic consequence. Military urbanism and urban militant chic are indeed connected. The hipsters in AK47 T-shirts are quite right that their claim to the inner city must be defended by force; its just that the ones doing the fighting are their displaced latino and black neighbours and the enemy are Iraqis.

2 Behind The Boom

By the late '90s Shoreditch and Hoxton were being trumpeted as a model for 'urban renaissance' by policy makers. Regeneration industry professionals and proponents of densely populated inner cities declared their commitment to fostering neighbourhoods with a mix of residential and commercial buildings, socially and economically diverse areas with 'mixed and balanced communities.' With the dotcom bubble yet to burst, Shoreditch was held up as an example of how the 'inner core' of the city, allegedly abandoned after the flight of working class inhabitants to the suburbs in the '60s and '70s, could 'come back to life' if the area's 'residual' population of deadbeats were supplemented (that is, supplanted) by a lively group of dynamic and entrepreneurial cultural professionals. From the beginning this notion of new 'life' served to obfuscate whose life was being discussed – not that of the area's economically challenged majority, it would seem.

New Labour claimed that the 'revival' of inner cities was good news not just for the affluent newcomers but that the commercial and cultural activity they began would bring prosperity and opportunity for all. Vibrant, ferociously networking creatives would displace the depressing homogeneity (and the social support networks) of the working class. As we have mentioned, the dotcom boom soon saw the artists' studios, clubs and experimental cinemas that started things off ousted by landlords keen to cash in. When the surge of new economy related businesses itself proved short lived, the dotcom's avant garde loft-style offices became yet more bars and restaurants or just fell empty once again, a memento of the bubble and a portent of a bigger crash still to come.²

While Shoreditch's magic circle was in the media spotlight the most massive and significant changes in the borough of Hackney, and indeed the city as a whole, were scarcely discussed. The

social cleansing of working class communities across large swaths of London's inner core, vicious cuts, privatisation, and Eastern European levels of poverty coincided with the highest number of housing privatisation ballots in the country. The latter, advanced in the name of 'regeneration' served to hasten the theft of the city from its true 'creative class', re-engineering former industrial areas as a playground for young middle-class consumers of surplus value.

Although it is notoriously difficult to get precise figures, I would guess that as much as 40% of Hackney's working class population have been pushed out of the area through the combined effect of rising rents, evictions, demolition and transfer of council housing into the hands of housing associations. In the last ten years council estates have been demolished or sold off to be replaced by so-called 'affordable housing' – which, given house price inflation, no one can afford. Major and Blair alike have honoured Margaret Thatcher's mission to privatise the remains of the welfare state commons and impose 'consumer choice' on an increasingly impoverished majority too poor to exercise the inalienable 'right to buy' when it comes to their basic need for shelter.

The local authorities in gentrifying areas connive with developers by letting social housing crumble, forcing residents to either accept a lifetime of shitty accommodation and rising crime or transfer to housing association landlords who promise (but by no means always deliver) repairs and maintenance which was once provided by the government. While in Shoreditch and the borough of Hackney this has seen a few estates 'regenerated', many more remain in an appalling condition. Where there are improvements in the physical state of the buildings this comes at the cost of the definitive loss of the (relative) security of tenure offered by state owned and run housing, and the beginning of what promise to be exponential rent rises. Privatisation of services in Hackney has converged with the privatisation of space such that where services work at all the workers enjoy lower wages and more precarious contracts, and the consumers, in the case of companies like Pinnacle (social housing maintenance) and ITNet (housing benefit) worse or non existent services. The level of private policing and the number of CCTV cameras rises as the local police and council workers grow ever less keen to visit the estates (unless of course they are wearing their newly issued bullet proof vests!).

But didn't Shoreditch also offer new chances to those whose homes were being sold off and traditional hang outs (the rapidly closing or gentrifying pubs and caffs) shut down or reoccupied? While some new businesses did spring up, these did not cater to or even employ the working class population of the area. Again, the rhetoric of diversity and opportunity (new jobs, training, participatory local democracy and community based initiatives) served only to cover over the evictions and expropriations, devolving responsibility for these onto the population they attacked. The increasing use of local community groups and referendums to integrate local people into the process has functioned to give it a veneer of legitimacy rather than effecting a real transfer of power. Those that participate in 'Neighbourhood Renewal' projects like Shoreditch New Deal (now rebranded as Shoreditch Our Way) have been known to describe the process as 'not consultation but dictation'.

3 Creative Destruction

After all the talk of 'inner city renaissance', the government this year (2004) finally admitted in a white paper on the area that Shoreditch was not the success story that they had claimed. No, it was an example of 'failed cultural regeneration'. Finally acknowledging the displacement of less affluent local people and the reality that the different social and economic groups in the area do not mix but rather pursue existences of segregated proximity, the report noted the 'failure' of the gentrification process to deliver improved services or housing for the poor. It is interesting

Gentrification takes from the poor and gives to the rich. Anything residually 'public' will either be reclaimed for the middle class or left to rot

that the official discourse, which took a long time to start selling the idea of Shoreditch as a model of 'creative regeneration', is now so quickly having to reposition its flagship as a failure. Yet in the absence of other models, the old story of rebirth through the clustering of creative small businesses is still being rolled out. Despite all proof to the contrary, Shoreditch is still being cited as a model.

According to Creative London, the London Development Agency's new 10-year action plan for culture-driven urban renewal, the Shoreditch effect, harnessed and made more efficient, is to be repeated across the city's 'run down' areas. Presumably they hadn't heard the news about Shoreditch when they put this latest parcel of guff together, or maybe they know very well what 'creative regeneration' really means and are more inspired by Shoreditch than ever. Far from indifferent to the problem of gentrification, the regeneration elite now see that the re-valorising 'creative class' they admire tend to be displaced by their own success in making areas fashionable. Creative London tries to 'address' this by seeking to help small creative businesses remain in the city and attracting them to areas targeted for 'renewal' in the hope of reproducing and harnessing a Shoreditch type buzz.

According to its website Creative London, aims to 'Galvanize London's creative sector, and bring businesses and people together to make more combined noise.' This punk rock definition of instrumentalised culture continues to favour the development of 'cultural hubs' as catalysts for the intensified privatisation and productivisation of remaining pockets of cheap living in the city. The difference is that now the government's intervention in gentrification is even more direct, more conscious and, as ever, more smoothly presented. Rather than an unfortunate side effect of the real estate market, gentrification is an openly pursued policy objective. Like all the other facts of life under the naturalised neoliberal order, the government will help the privileged negotiate the necessarily precarious nature of unmitigated capitalism but only in a 'dynamic' way.

Exemplifying this tender mercy for the favoured class, Creative London includes a Property Advice Service to help the cultural vanguard find and develop new spaces when their existing ones becoming insupportably expensive. Soliciting creatives to take on and realise the potential of crumbling industrial hulks and potentially dangerous bits of un-reproduced fixed capital, behind the scheme's 'honest broker' rhetoric, the economic imperative is plain: Be our caretakers, reconstruct and make trendy our knackered infrastructure, take the risks involved in repairing dangerous buildings, and when you're done, fuck off. Of course the homeless, squatters and other malcontents who once enjoyed the opportunity to explore such places 'potential' will now find themselves in competition with government-assisted culturepreneurs, but that is the dynamic, Darwinian nature of creative urbanism. May the most excellent man win (the right to a deferred eviction).

Ethical qualms aside, Creative London and the general ideology of culture-driven regeneration remains committed to the unlikely notion that a dense cluster of web designers and style magazines can be a substitute for the mass concentration of capital and labour that once provided the motor for genuinely productive industries. Stressing the importance of Ideas and the knowledge economy schtick that networked creative communities produce a qualitative leap

in ‘value’ generation (as opposed to a pooling of value hoovers sucking up surplus value from across the world), the ideologues of this process elaborate a frighteningly self-assured action plan which positions themselves as ‘the stewards of our communities’, and identifies as targets for removal a series of synonyms for the informalised working class: ‘Remove barriers to tolerance such as mediocrity, intolerance [sic], disconnectedness, sprawl, poverty, bad schools, exclusivity, and social and environmental degradation.’³ When they say ‘remove’ there is nothing to suggest they mean ‘ameliorate’ – such ideological wish lists are a combination of make believe and a ruthless intent to rectify the community in the image of a commercial utopia in which all perform free labour under the euphemism of ‘creativity’. The recognition that ‘Creativity can happen at anytime, anywhere, and it’s happening in your community right now’, is simply the familiar assertion that all life is available for work and that a complete mobilisation of the social process is necessary to squeeze a profit out of the ‘economically inactive’.

‘Everyone is a part of the value chain of creativity’, but only those at the top are getting remunerated. The contemporary equivalent of feudalism’s great chain of being, the value chain of creativity imagines a metastable dis-orderly universe of Excellence based on well-policed chaos in which the soi-disant creative class serve king capital as instruments of his divine will and ambassadors of the new work ethic.

The underlying imperatives of an era in which productive investment is increasingly impossible for knackered old capitals like Britain or the US mean that even those who demand a less cosmetic solution to the problems of the inner cities are invoking a chimera. The vision of ideologues like Richard Florida and the self-styled ‘Creative 100’ quoted above, is at once feeble and terrifying, since, in the absence of productive investment in the real economy (and its structural impossibility for countries like the UK), the extraction of the dregs of surplus value from those outside the magic circle will be as brutal as it is euphemised. Identifying new sources of labour, whether in the third world or at home, involves policing, coercion and co-optation, the theft of people’s space, time, imagination and ideas and the redirection of opposition into manageable forms.

If one abandons the quaint notion that regeneration’s real aim is to produce a mixed and balanced community with ‘social housing’ and (‘good’) jobs etc, then it doesn’t seem so perverse and ineffectual after all. Viewed in the light of the international experience of gentrification, culture-led regeneration can be seen as the expanded, private-public consummation of the process of revalorisation and looting described above. Increased social polarisation and the (re)imposition of work through intensified economic pressure combine with private capital’s pillaging of former public resources (as well as existing communities, bodies, knowledges, etc) in a desperate scramble to suck up every last drop of surplus value from increasingly unproductive 1st world cities. Regeneration is not so much the rebirth of the dormant industrial city but its undeath, bled dry by a vampiric regime of inflation and austerity.

Gentrification’s vanguard
are at their most
depoliticised when at their
most radically chic



4 (Un)regenerate Art?

Whether overtly declared as the ultimate motivation for financial support to the arts (‘cultural tourism’ as economic motor), or as a ‘side-effect’ of the work of visibility and valorisation performed when artists colonise and gentrify an area, the subsumption of art under regeneration is so advanced that to look at art without looking at the project for ‘urban renewal’ in which it is inscribed is to miss half, or perhaps more than half, of its social (or rather, economic) function. With London’s more ‘socially engaged’ art scene continuing to burgeon, artists find funding by assuming the role of surrogate and simulacral service providers delivering cheap but cosmetic substitutes for welfare provision. While cultural agencies pour millions into flagship projects that almost immediately sink, artists are a low risk investment. From the task of ‘beautifying’ the inner city with anodyne public art to the social work and community-oriented projects favored by its ‘New Genre Public Art’ successors, artists are paragons of regenerate citizenship, not least in their capacity to work for free while generating that marketable ‘buzz’.

In world cities like London and the slums of the third world alike, labour, waged and unwaged, is ever more responsible for its own reproduction. The ‘creative entrepreneurialism’ identified by Creative London as the key to revived inner cities is the upscale reflection of a survivalist condition in which insecurity drives the underpaid into overwork. Participation in the valorisation of life/labour – whether helping run your block of flats or talking to a concerned artist about your memories of displacement – is not so much solicited as compulsory. Consequently, in a regeneration regime it becomes easier to get your experience of urban blight plotted on a psychogeographic map of your area than to obtain hospital treatment, housing or a day off work.

In a similarly perverted piece of logic, the UK’s New Labour government now hails ‘complex art’ as a way to challenge the ‘poverty of aspiration’ and ‘low expectations’ allegedly afflicting the lower class. The ongoing increase in simple poverty is ignored.⁴ Although social engagement on the part of artists is viewed as a beneficial and moral expansion of their activities into the community, artists’ role is primarily to provide stimulus to and communitarian credibility for the process of privatisation and gentrification which the term ‘regeneration’ figures as progress and renewal.

If politicised, will socially engaged art practices one day spark unforeseen alliances against the dominant regeneration agenda? Perhaps the imminent collapse of the property market bubble will trigger a new, more creatively destructive attitude to the regeneration-art symbiosis on the part of the regeneration industry’s favourite people.

Notes

1. However, the ‘urban pioneers’ and their successors who live in gentrifying areas are not guaranteed immunity from the overall devalorisation of fixed capital in which gentrification’s localised valorisation take place. Witness the case of the 30-year-old New York professional recently electrocuted by a Lower East Side manhole cover that, as a result of million dollar cuts in maintenance by utilities provider Con Edison, had become live. A neat image of the kind of pay back that all this non-reproduction of infrastructure and economic polarisation is no doubt storing up for the privileged class, but only a more extreme instance of the low-level violence daily visited on the working class within areas of localised renewal. Property prices and rents may be rocketing but in gentrification zones life is of necessity cheap and citizenship precarious or, indeed, cancelled. The rich are simply those with better insurance and security guards to protect their fundamentally insecure investments.
2. At the same time many new large-scale, flagship PFI projects were begun further into the borough of Hackney of which Shoreditch was very much a model of transformation. These included an Olympic size swimming pool, a library, and a major music venue. Of these, five years later, almost all have closed, their economic and/or physical infrastructures proving feeble and badly constructed. Most of these projects came in millions over budget, and, while hundreds of other services (including very functional swimming baths, schools, playing fields, etc) were simultaneously being scrapped as part of the local council’s efforts to impose economic austerity, they seem to combine unproductive expenditure on a Bataillean scale with the most miserly and reductive conception of culture imaginable. In the name of competition and efficiency the bigger scale regeneration process has wasted millions and made local people’s lives more difficult, expensive and precarious. What have the Romans ever done for us? as Tony Blair asked, waggishly paraphrasing The Life of Brian. Well, the Romans aquaducts are still standing; Tony’s domes and amphitheatres collapse on completion.
3. From The Memphis Manifesto, A Map to the Future by the Creative 100. <http://www.memphismanifesto.com/themanifesto/> The same kind of mephitic cheerleading can be found on the LDA website for Creative London: <http://www.creativelondon.org.uk/>
4. See ‘From Hard Edged Compassion to Instrumentalism Light’ in Variant 20, Summer 2004.

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The End of Israel's Impunity?

Muhammad Idrees Ahmad

The assault on Gaza marks the end of an era for Israel. For the second time in two years its colonial ambition has floundered in the face of determined resistance. It may persist for some time; but the trajectory is clear – it is losing both legitimacy and power. Support for it is dwindling in Washington; its friends are alarmed. Citizens are acting where governments have failed; the movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions is snowballing. Apologists are finding it more difficult to justify its persistent criminality. Rifts have emerged in the transatlantic alliance over its recent actions; EU leaders have broken with Israel and the US, questioning the wisdom of continuing to isolate Hamas. Even the pliant Tony Blair will no longer toe the line.

This leviathan may yet be tamed, accountability restored; but what part, if any, will international law have played in this?

At one point in Errol Morris's 2004 documentary 'Fog of War', former US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara recounts a conversation he had had with General Curtis Lemay of the United States Air Force *à propos* the fire bombing of Japanese cities. LeMay, according to McNamara, said that if the US ended up losing the war "we would be hanged for this". As it transpired, the US did not lose; and far from being hanged, the allied command got to play hangman.¹ The trials that led to the execution of German and Japanese high command assumed a broader significance; they became the founding documents of international law. The conclusions from these trials served as the basis for the Genocide Convention (1948), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Nuremberg Principles (1950), The Convention on the Abolition of the Statute of Limitations on War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (1968), the Geneva Convention on the Laws and Customs of War (1949), its supplementary protocols (1977), and the International Criminal Court (2002).

As Kirsten Sellars details in her book 'The Rise and Rise of Human Rights,' the Nuremberg trials and the subsequent Tokyo trials which would later provide the basis for international law were not themselves free of controversy. At the end of the war, Western powers saw Germany and Japan as potential allies in the looming conflict against the Soviet Union. However, the passions that had been mobilized against the Axis powers demanded blood sacrifice before Japan and Germany could be laundered back into the Free World. It was to satisfy this purpose that the tribunals were reluctantly instituted. While Justice Robert Jackson's eloquent pronouncements on the rule of law in international affairs have become *de rigueur* in discourses on the subject, his contemporaries took a less generous view. US chief justice Harlan Stone called the whole Nuremberg exercise a "sanctimonious...fraud" accusing Jackson of conducting a "high-grade lynching party". Justice

William Douglas of the US Supreme Court accused the allies of "substituting power for principle" and creating laws "ex post facto to suit the passion and clamour of the time". In his famous dissent at the Tokyo trials, Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal indicted the tribunal for its exclusion of European colonialism and the American use of the atomic bomb. The trial, he argued, was nothing more than an "opportunity for the victors to retaliate". Antiwar US senator Robert Taft called it "victors' justice".

Power asymmetry has defined the application of International Law since. Gaza is a case in point.

Jus ad Bellum?

Israel and its apologists have sought to justify its military assault on Gaza as an act of "self-defence" against Hamas rockets invoking Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.² So pervasive was this view that even putatively antiwar voices frequently worked the word "disproportionate" into their denunciations. Israel, according to this view, has a right to defend itself but used more force than was necessary. However, this argument relies on the inversion of cause and effect and a defective legal premise.

Israel's assault was not meant to protect its citizens against the Hamas rockets, but to protect its colonial project and right to continue the strangulation of Gaza. Israel broke the truce on 4th November 2008 when under the cover of the US elections it launched an attack inside Gaza killing six Palestinians. The attack, writes Middle East scholar Sara Roy, was "no doubt designed finally to undermine the truce",³ as even according to Israel's own intelligence agencies Hamas had implemented the ceasefire with remarkable effectiveness. Though Hamas retaliated with rockets, it still offered to renew the truce provided Israel ended the siege. Israel refused.⁴

Between the evacuation of its settlements from Gaza in 2005 and the beginning of its latest assault, Israel had killed a total of 1,250 Palestinians, including 222 children, and maimed many more. This despite Hamas's 18 month unilateral ceasefire to which it strictly adhered. The situation was so dismal before the siege that the late Israeli historian and author Tanya Reinhart described it as "a process of slow and steady genocide".⁵ Sara Roy saw in it a deliberate process of what she calls "de-development". The siege, in her view, had two objectives: to reduce the Palestinian issue to a humanitarian problem; and to "foist Gaza onto Egypt". Israel's economic stranglehold over the territory, she said, was leading to the "breakdown of an entire society".⁶

The UN human rights rapporteur John Dugard, a South African legal scholar, has compared the situation in the Occupied Territories to apartheid. His successor Richard Falk, an American Jew and a leading authority on international law, called the situation a "prelude to genocide". Gaza, he said, was "slouching towards a holocaust" insofar as the situation expressed vividly "a deliberate intention on the part of Israel and its allies to subject an entire human community to life-endangering conditions of utmost cruelty". Falk accused Israel of bringing Gaza to the "brink of collective starvation", imposing "a sub-human existence" on a people "repeatedly and systematically" victimized. Poignantly, he added:

"To persist with such an approach under present circumstances is indeed genocidal, and risks destroying an entire Palestinian community that is an integral part of an ethnic whole. It is this prospect that makes appropriate the warning of a Palestinian holocaust in the making, and should remind the world of the famous post-Nazi pledge of 'never again'."⁷

On 5th November, Israel sealed all entries and exits to Gaza and intensified the stranglehold.

For Gaza – a region whose unemployment

rate is 49.1%, where the majority relies on food aid (from the World Food Program and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the latter alone feeding about 750,000 Gazans), and 50% of whose population comprises children – the consequences were devastating. Roy reports that according to Oxfam, an average of 4.6 trucks per day entered Gaza in November 2008 as compared to 564 trucks a day in December 2005. There were three days where 20,000 went without food and on 18 December UNRWA had to suspend food distribution altogether. On top of that, the WFP had to pay more than \$300,000 to Israeli businesses in November and December for storage of the food being withheld from Gaza. Thirty out of Gaza's forty-seven commercial bakeries had to close for the lack of cooking gas; by April there will be no poultry, on which 70% of Gazans rely for their protein. UNRWA's cash assistance to the most needy has had to be suspended. The embargo on paper, ink and glue needed for the production of textbooks would affect 200,000 students.⁸

Gaza faces regular shortages of diesel, petrol and cooking gas. On 13th November, Gaza's only power station suspended operations because it ran out of industrial diesel. Spare parts for the power station were auctioned by Israel after being held in customs for eight months. Gaza's hospitals have had to rely on diesel and gas smuggled from Egypt via the tunnels. In an attempt to undermine Hamas, Israel's surrogates in the Palestinian Authority (PA) withheld World Bank funds from Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) to pay for fuel to run Gaza's sewage system. Israel has allowed in only 18 of the 200 tons of chlorine requested by CMWU for water purification. While medical supplies in Gaza have been running dangerously low, the collaborationist PA has been turning supply shipments away rather than send them to Gaza.⁹

It was within this context that on 19th December Hamas officially ended its truce.

All of this is significant, as in 1967 Israel used Nasser's blockade of the Gulf of Tiran as the *casus belli* for its pre-emptive attacks on Egypt, Syria and Jordan – the fateful war where it captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Unlike Gaza, however, Israel faced no shortages of food, fuel or medicine – indeed, trade continued unimpeded all across its main air- and sea ports (all of which are located on the Mediterranean coast). Yet, in spite of the facts, '67 has entered mainstream discourse as a legitimate case of pre-emptive self-defence under Article 51 of the Geneva Conventions. The precedent was even invoked by Colin Powell when on 5th February 2003 he made his case for invading Iraq at the UN Security Council. If Israel was within its rights to launch a pre-emptive war in '67 – a highly tendentious proposition – then the Palestinians most definitely had a similar right. It is not only enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention, it is also accorded them by virtue of Israel's denial of basic necessities.

But what of international law?

The use of force is an act of last resort under international law subject to the customary rules of proportionality and necessity. As a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, Israel has a right to defend itself against attacks; but it has no right to do so by force. In order to use force, it will have to show that other options were not available. This was clearly not the case. It had the option to end its occupation, withdraw from Palestinian land, and accept the international consensus on the two-state solution. It also had more immediate options: it could have agreed to renew the truce and end the crippling siege of Gaza. The Hamas government had made three separate peace offers over a period of two years through veteran Israeli peace activist Gershon Baskin, including one a mere two weeks before the assault. Relayed through a family member of Israeli Prime

Even putatively antiwar voices frequently worked the word "disproportionate" into their denunciations. This argument relies on the inversion of cause and effect and a defective legal premise.

Minister Ehud Olmert all of these overtures were rebuffed.¹⁰ In spurning this opportunity Israel had forfeited any claims to self-defence. Had Hamas attacked *after* Israel had tried all these options, writes political scientist Jerome Slater, “then – and only then – would it have a true ‘right of self defense’.” It is also the only condition under which the question of proportionality would arise.

The rocket attacks had not killed a single individual before Israel began its assault; had they done so, they would still not entitle Israel to kill 1,300 Palestinians, mostly civilians, injure 5,000 and destroy schools, mosques, homes, UN compounds and government buildings. As the occupying power Israel has no rights under the Fourth Geneva Convention, it has only obligations – including a responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians and infrastructure. And as the occupied the Palestinians have a right to resist Israel’s oppression. Writes Slater: “An oppressor is not engaged in ‘self defense’ when it uses force in order to annihilate resistance to its repression, and that holds true even if the form of resistance—attacks intended to kill civilians—is itself morally wrong”. The fact is lost on no-one, except perhaps the BBC and CNN, that Israel’s occupation predates both the rockets *and* Hamas. “Israel’s actions amount to aggression, not self-defence,” wrote distinguished lawyers and legal scholars in an 11th January 2009 letter to the *Sunday Times*, “not least because its assault on Gaza was unnecessary”. They added:

“As things stand, its invasion and bombardment of Gaza amounts to collective punishment of Gaza’s 1.5m inhabitants contrary to international humanitarian and human rights law. In addition, the blockade of humanitarian relief, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and preventing access to basic necessities such as food and fuel, are *prima facie* war crimes.”

That the Palestinians also have a right to self-defence is not an issue the UN Security Council would even allow anyone to raise. Instead, there are feeble pleas for ‘restraint’. In lieu of an investigation, in the initial phase of the massacre some UN officials dignified the Israeli claim that a mere 25% of the Palestinian casualties were civilians (in fact the majority were police trainees killed at their graduation). The notoriously undemocratic executive arm of the UN continued to treat the assault as a ‘war’ even though Gaza is recognized as an Occupied Territory, according Israel the right to ‘defend itself’, albeit ‘proportionately’. In reserving their condemnation exclusively for the targeting of ‘women and children’, the UN was also declaring Gaza’s male population fair game. Despite the verdict of international law experts that Israel’s murder spree in Gaza constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity, writes Omar Barghouti, “this UN discourse not only reduces close to half a million Palestinian men in that wretched, tormented and occupied coastal strip to “militants,” radical “fighters,” or whatever other nouns in currency nowadays in the astoundingly, but characteristically, biased western media coverage...it also treats them as already condemned criminals that deserve the capital punishment Israel has meted out on them.” (*The Electronic Intifada*, January 1st 2009)

Jus in Bello

Israel made no bones about its attacks on civilian targets: one army spokeswoman declared that “[a]nything affiliated with Hamas is a legitimate target”; another added that “we are trying to hit the whole spectrum, because everything is connected and everything supports terrorism against Israel”. The government which had only a year earlier rejected the results of an election which had seen Hamas take the majority of the vote, was suddenly willing to acknowledge the party’s popularity so it could hold it against the whole population of Gaza as evidence of their support for “terrorism against Israel”.¹¹ As the democratically elected government of the Palestinian people all of Gaza’s civilian infrastructure was thus “affiliated” with

As the occupying power Israel has no rights under the Fourth Geneva Convention, it has only obligations – including a responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians and infrastructure.

Hamas and hence a legitimate target. In the very first hour of its assault Israel bombed the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Ministries of Education and Justice, the Islamic University of Gaza, mosques, ambulances and many homes. Palesitnian civilian infrastructure was subjected as a whole to Israeli terror. By the end, Israel had destroyed 4,700 homes completely or partially, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless.

Sara Roy implored the world in the name of International law – and “human decency” – to protect the people of Gaza. Perhaps the appeal to human decency is a tacit acknowledgment of the irrelevance of international law where it doesn’t align with the interests of major powers. As Conor Gearty notes, the assault on Gaza “has laid bare the relative impotence of international law in the face of determined sovereign action”.¹² Like Roy and Gearty, Falk also places little faith in international law for redress. It would be unrealistic, he writes, “to expect the UN to do anything in the face of this crisis, given the pattern of US support for Israel and taking into account the extent to which European governments have lent their weight to recent illicit efforts to crush Hamas as a Palestinian political force”.¹³

The impotence of the mechanisms for enforcing international law was exposed in Israel’s refusal to heed the UN’s calls for a ceasefire. Israel blithely ignored the UN Security Council’s call on January 8th 2009 for “an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire”. Likewise, it ignored the strong statement by High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, the next day about the applicability of international human rights law “in all circumstances and at all times”. Pillay stressed that the violations of these laws “may constitute war crimes for which individual criminal responsibility may be invoked”. She urged the UN’s Human Rights Council to “consider authorizing a mission to assess violations” in order to establish “the relevant facts and ensure accountability”. The Council in its resolution said that it “strongly condemns the ongoing military operation” for its “massive violations of human rights of Palestinian people and systematic destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure”; it was particularly outraged at Israel’s “targeting” of UN facilities. At the conclusion of the assault, Ban Ki Moon, the UN Secretary General himself, visited Gaza. He said he was “appalled” by the destruction, which he found “outrageous and totally unacceptable” and called for the perpetrators to be “punished”.¹⁴ The UN has called for the attack to be investigated as a war crime.

Writes Gearty:

“The anger evident in all this UN activity, and in particular the passion evident in the High Commissioner’s choice of words, is founded upon the blatancy of the disregard of the law that has been evident in Gaza.”¹⁵

In a highly unusual move, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) broke with convention to condemn the Israeli military for

breaching international humanitarian law when it refused access for four days to a Zeitoun neighbourhood where four small children were later found starving among twelve corpses, including those of their mothers. The incident also occasioned one of the most extraordinary moments in the history of British journalism when Alex Thomson of Channel 4 subjected the Israeli spokesperson Mark Regev to an unrelenting interrogation ending with the plea, “In the name of humanity what is Israel doing?”¹⁶

While Israel may have taken a hit in terms of its image – already the worst brand in the world, according to a 2006 poll¹⁷ – a wave of boycotts sweeping Europe also adds economic pressure. “But in the absence of any kind of enforcement mechanism,” writes Gearty, “the legal effect of all this international noise has been for all practical purposes zero”.¹⁸ There being no international adjudicative body to which Israel is required to defer, he writes, the worst Israel has to fear is five minutes of interrogation on the media, which is itself a rare occurrence. Israel’s claim to self-defence “might not be able to survive a few hours in a court of law”, Gearty avers, but with a mostly pliant media already humming with a chorus of friendly ‘academic terrorism experts’ and ‘defence analysts’ Israel is all but immune from accountability.¹⁹

It was Israel’s ’67 pre-emptive attacks on neighbouring Arab states and Reagan’s March 1986 bombing of Libya – both invoking Article 51 of the UN charter – that demonstrated that unilateral action was possible without eliciting any legal repercussions. The US refusal to join the International Criminal Court, and Israel’s repeated rejection of its jurisdiction, is transforming the whole concept of international law is revealed so far to be a farce. The only people brought to trial in the Hague have all belonged to countries either on the rough end of the unipolar world’s stick, or to countries in which major powers have no vested interests. The irony of the US supporting the ICC’s prosecution of Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir while itself refusing to ratify its charter is lost on few in the outside world. Under these circumstances, warnings about criminal responsibility are seen as little more than empty threats. International law has hitherto served no purpose other than to lull the aggrieved into believing that verbal indictments are somehow a substitute for justice.

The End of Impunity?

Concerns about prosecutions at the Hague led the Bush administration to repeal the US signature from the treaty enabling the ICC and in 2002 to pass the American Service Members Protection Act (ASMPA), more commonly known as the Invasion of The Hague Act which permits the United States to unilaterally invade the Netherlands to liberate any military personnel and other elected and appointed officials held for war crimes. The US also pressured weaker states around the world to sign ‘bilateral immunity’ policies that require them to sign a waiver stating that they will contravene the ICC in the case of Americans being arrested. Those who do not comply risk losing US military assistance: Kenya and Trinidad-Tobago, for example, learned this the hard way. According to the *Observer*, ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo is already pursuing seriously the legal instruments that would allow him to put Israelis on trial for war crimes.²⁰ Fear of prosecution has already caused the Israeli government to launch an international campaign to defend its legal position while and at the same time redacting names written in reports and masking photographs of military personnel involved. Director of the Israel Law Center, Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, has opted for bluster, urging the Knesset to legislate a law prohibiting cooperation with any war crimes tribunal and to pass an ASMPA-style Invasion of the Hague law. “Foreign countries should be made to understand we mean business”, she added.

Obstacles remain, however, and precedents of the actual implementation of international law

demand one to attenuate expectations. It is this recognition that has led some to consider using the universal jurisdiction laws enshrined in the legal codes of several European countries to bring US and Israeli war criminals to the dock. Several Israelis have already had close brushes with the law in Europe. In 2001 prosecutors in Belgium filed a war crimes indictment against Ariel Sharon and General Amos Yaron over their responsibility for the massacre of Palestinians in Lebanon. The case was later dismissed by an appeals court on a technicality. On 10th September 2005, General Doron Almog escaped arrest on arrival in London only through a last minute warning from someone at the Foreign Office. Had he disembarked, he would have faced arrest for violations of the Geneva Convention in carrying out house demolitions in Gaza.

Using the same laws that led to the 1998 arrest of the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, Spanish judge Fernando Andreu has launched an investigation of Israeli officials over a 2002 bombing where a one-ton bomb dropped on a densely populated Gaza neighbourhood killed fifteen, including nine children. Those charged include former defense minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer; former chief-of-staff, Moshe Ya’alon; former airforce chief, Dan Halutz; head of Southern command, Doron Almog; head of the National Security Council, Giora Eiland; the defense minister’s military secretary, Mike Herzog; and head of Shin Bet, Avi Dichter. The Israel lobby flexed its muscle, and foreign minister Tzipi Livni was soon claiming that she had been assured by her Spanish counterpart, Miguel Moratinos, that his government would amend its laws to diminish the possibility of investigating torture and war crimes committed outside Spain. This however was immediately contradicted by Deputy Prime Minister María Teresa Fernández de la Vega who stated defiantly that “Spain is a country ruled by law” whose justice system enjoys “absolute independence”; this fact was “made clear to Israel and we are sure they understand this”.²¹

The ground is also shrinking around leading US war criminals. Henry Kissinger already can’t set foot in many European countries without risking arrest. Donald Rumsfeld likewise had to be spirited out of Paris a few years back in order to save him the embarrassment of being served a French subpoena. Recently the renowned prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi has shown how criminal law can be used to prosecute George W. Bush for murder in any of the districts where a soldier has been killed as a result of a war sold on lies.²² Until international law evolves a mechanism for enforcement that does not allow any state exemption from its purview, the potential of domestic laws to keep war criminals on their toes if not behind bars will remain indispensable.

In the wake of the 11th September 2001 attacks, Dick Cheney and the cabal of neoconservatives around him had gone about dismantling the international legal framework which had been developed across several presidencies as a result of a growing preference for hegemony by consent rather than coercion. Given the extreme unpopularity of the last regime, Obama feels compelled pragmatically to distance himself from its legacy. The appointments of George Mitchell as Middle East envoy and Charles Freeman as the director of the National Intelligence Council have already occasioned tension between the Obama administration and the Israel lobby. The growing unease over the ascension of Benjamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman to power in Israel is only likely to exacerbate matters. Gestures towards Syria and Iran have caused alarm among Israel-Firsters in Washington. While many rightly criticized Obama for his silence in the face of the Israeli slaughter, the standard reflex of a US politician would have been to come out unconditionally in support of the attacks.

In a remarkable departure from her earlier stance where she opposed the impeachment of Bush administration officials, the house majority leader, Nancy Pelosi, has recently declared that “no one is above the law”.²³ Maybe she only wants

The rocket attacks had not killed a single individual before Israel began its assault; had they done so, they would still not entitle Israel to kill 1,300 Palestinians, mostly civilians

to one-up Senator Patrick Leahy who has proposed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But for the first time talk of prosecutions has entered mainstream discourse. What was dismissed as unthinkable only months ago appears now almost attainable. Since Pelosi controls the assignment of hearings to relevant committees in the Congress, writes the veteran journalist Alexander Cockburn, “this means that she could give the green light to House Justice Committee chairman John Conyers to organize hearings...equipped with a capable director and subpoena power - that is, the ability to compel testimony and documents under the threat of criminal sanction.”²⁴

Pelosi may or may not be serious but for the left there is a rich opportunity in all this, writes Cockburn. “Obama’s pledges in the campaign to run a lawful government were very explicit”. He clearly seeks a break with the image if not necessarily the policies of the Bush administration. The closing of Guantanamo and the categorical ban on torture is part of this new trajectory (even though unlawful detention and subcontracted torture will likely continue). This attempt to re-engage with the world will not be effective until Obama affirms US commitment to international law, including a re-signing of the ICC charter. This would also have the effect of empowering the UN rapporteurs, special representatives, tribunals and so on, Gearty argues:

“Since its application would be general, Obama could do all this without any mention of Israel, leaving the consequences to be worked through by various bureaucracies...Were pressure from the lobbies to reach dangerous levels, the president might choose to take the issue to the American people, to discuss openly whether Israel should have an exemption from the system of values to which...the US itself will by then have signed up.”²⁵

While this is no doubt a scenario that the Israel lobby would want to avoid, Gearty’s otherwise original and practical proposal overlooks the fact that the Israel lobby has long exploited an existing US disposition for unilateralism to generate hostility towards the UN. The UN is undermined in general so it won’t have any legitimacy when it comes to the particular demands of making Israel abide by its resolutions. The bulk of US vetoes in the Security Council have been cast in support of Israel. Likewise, the precedent of appealing directly to the public has also failed to gain any cover for the last two presidents who tried it. Both Gerald Ford and George Bush (Snr.) ended up as one-term presidents: the former balked after receiving a letter signed by the majority of the Senate; the latter suffered a major electoral loss for which the Israel lobby claimed credit.²⁶ However, Obama is in a unique position: he has the tide of history with him. He is also more susceptible to public pressure. The Israel lobby is on the backfoot. There has never been a time more propitious for groundbreaking change. Gaza was the catalyst. It is time demands were made of Obama to restore faith in international humanitarian law. Until then, Europe’s universal jurisdiction laws should suffice to keep the war

criminals on their toes.

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Notes

1. Since the allies had carried out more bombings of civilians than the axis powers, the American prosecutor Telford Taylor got around the problem by declaring that “the air bombardment of cities and factories has become a recognized part of modern warfare”, hence a part of “customary law”; and that since the fourth Hague convention of 1907, which forbade bombing of civilians, had not been applied during WWII, it had lost its validity (see Sven Linqvist, ‘A History of Bombing’, Granta, 2000, n.239)
2. Zionist propagandist Paul Berman who in his book ‘Terror and Liberalism’ ridiculed the notion that Israeli occupation might be the cause of Palestinian resentment had to resort to hyperbole in order to justify Israel’s killing of more than 400 children in Gaza. Israel, he told the American Jewish Committee’s webzine *Z Word*, did it to prevent ‘genocide’.
3. Sara Roy, ‘If Gaza Falls’, *London Review of Books*, 1st January 2009
4. Henry Siegman, ‘Israel’s Lies’, *London Review of Books*, 29th January 2009
5. Jon Elmer, ‘Slow Genocide: Tanya Reinhart interview’, From OccupiedPalestine.org, 10th September 2003
6. Roy, op. cit.
7. Richard Falk, ‘Slouching toward a Palestinian holocaust’, *The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research*, 29th June 2007
8. Roy, op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. See Peter Beaumont, ‘Israel PM’s family link to Hamas peace bid’, *The Observer*, 1st March 2009
11. Cited in John Mearsheimer, ‘Another war, another defeat’, *The American Conservative*, 26th January 2009
12. Conor Gearty, ‘Sovereign wrongs and human rights’, *The Tablet*, January 2009
13. Falk, op. cit.
14. Robert Fisk, ‘So, I asked the UN secretary general, isn’t it time for a war crimes tribunal?’, *The Independent*, 19th January 2009
15. Gearty, op. cit.
16. Channel 4 News, 8th January 2008. Video of exchange available at: <http://pulsemedia.org/2009/01/10/c4/>
17. ‘Survey:Israel worst brand name in the world’, *Israel Today*, 22nd November 2006
18. Gearty, op. cit.
19. For example, the BBC gave platform to the very dubious Col. Richard Kemp to make pronouncements such as “I don’t think there has ever been a time in the history of warfare when any army has made more efforts to reduce civilian casualties and deaths of innocent people than the IDF is doing today in Gaza” (can be seen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WssrKJ3Iqcw>). Over in the US, Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, earned his junket to Israel by declaring that it fought a “clean war” (“The ‘Gaza War’”, CSIS, 2nd February 2009). For a debunking of Cordesman, see Norman Finkelstein, ‘War Whore: A Camp Follower Who Aims to Please’, Pulsemedia.org, 19th February 2009
20. Peter Beaumont, *The Observer*, 2nd March 2009
21. JPost.com Staff, ‘Spain won’t annul judge’s decision’, *Jerusalem Post*, 1st February 2009
22. For a succinct summation of Bugliosi’s case, see his interview with Pulsemedia.org, 27th February 2009
23. ‘One-on-one with Nancy Pelosi’, *Rachel Maddow Show*, MSNBC, 25th February 2009
24. Alexander Cockburn, Counterpunch.org, 27th February 2009
25. Conor Gearty, *London Review of Books*, 15th January 2009
26. Philip Weiss, ‘Did the First President Bush Lose His Job to the Israel Lobby?’, *New York Observer*, 17th July 2006